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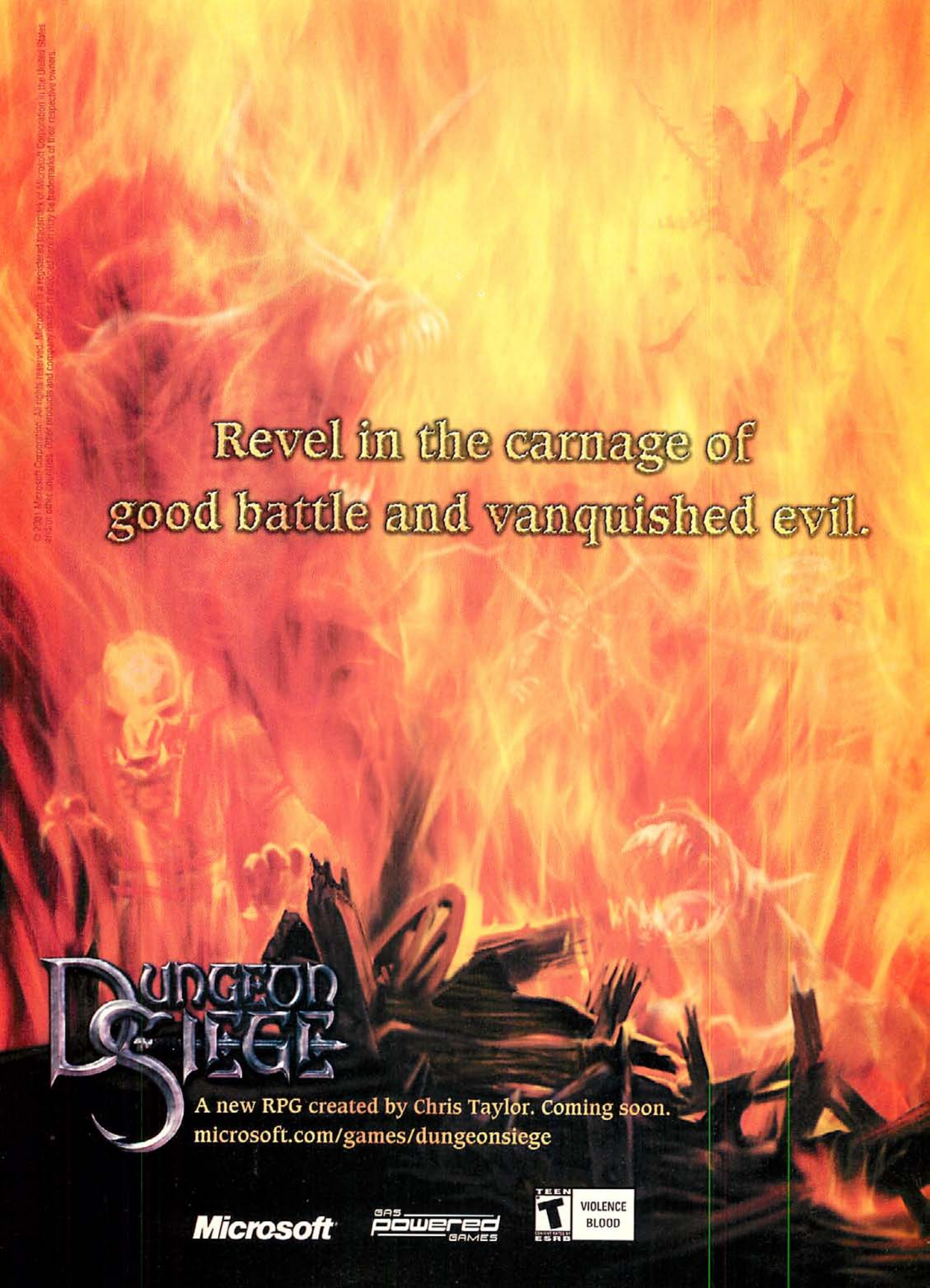
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- GeForce 3
- Fallout Tactics
- Heroes of Might and Magic IV
- Sigma
- Aliens vs. Predator 2
- Black Isle's TORN

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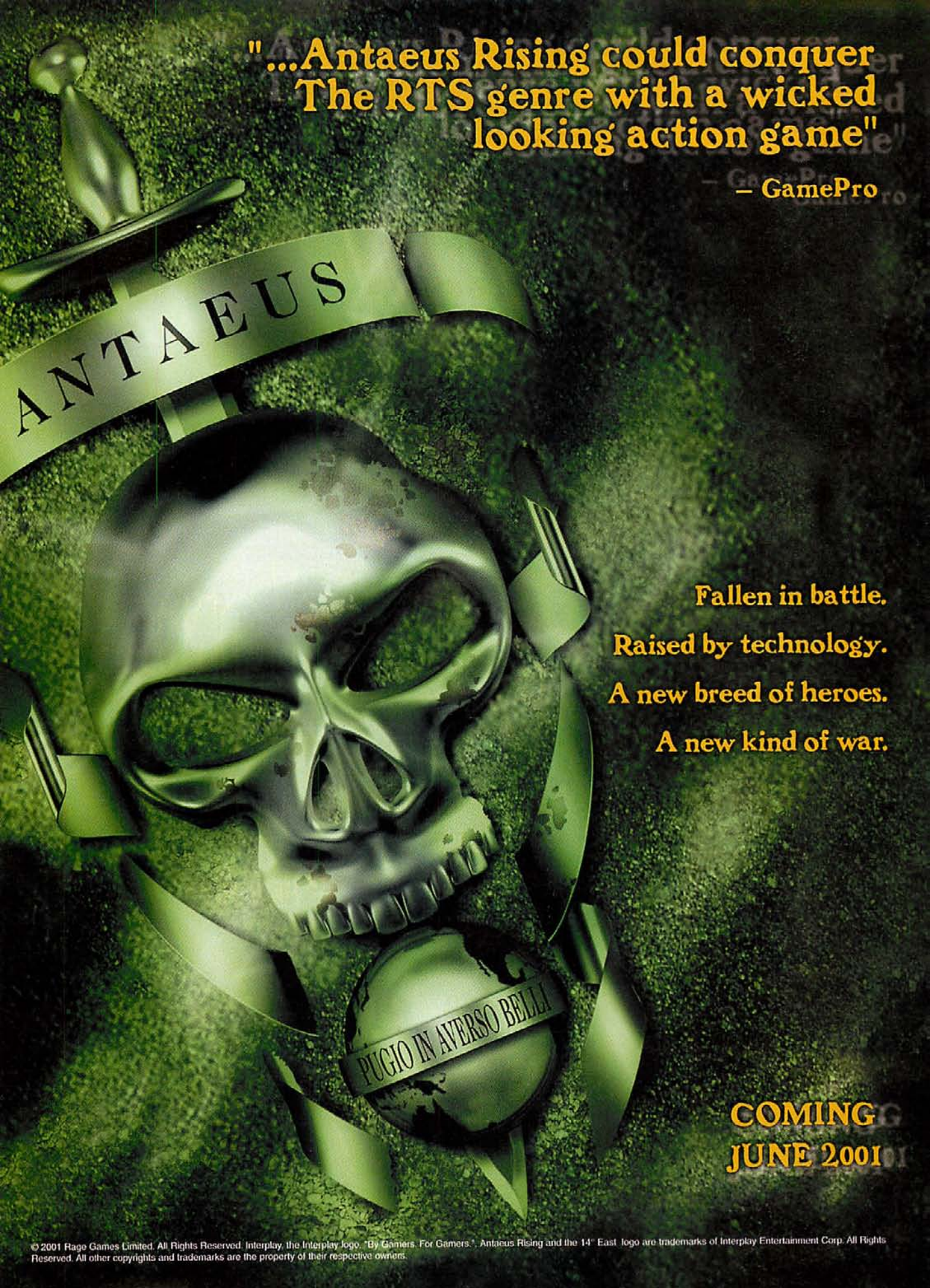
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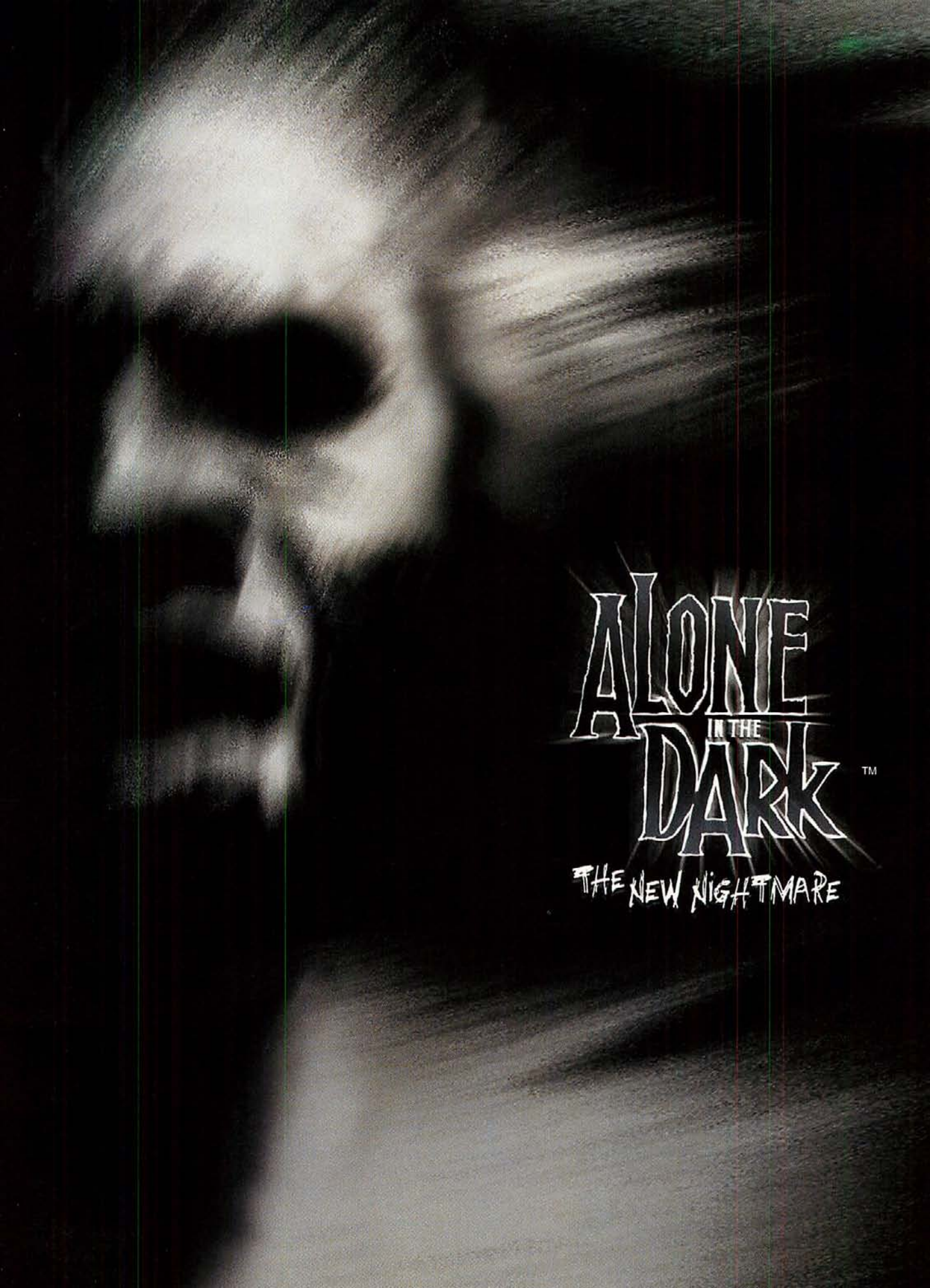
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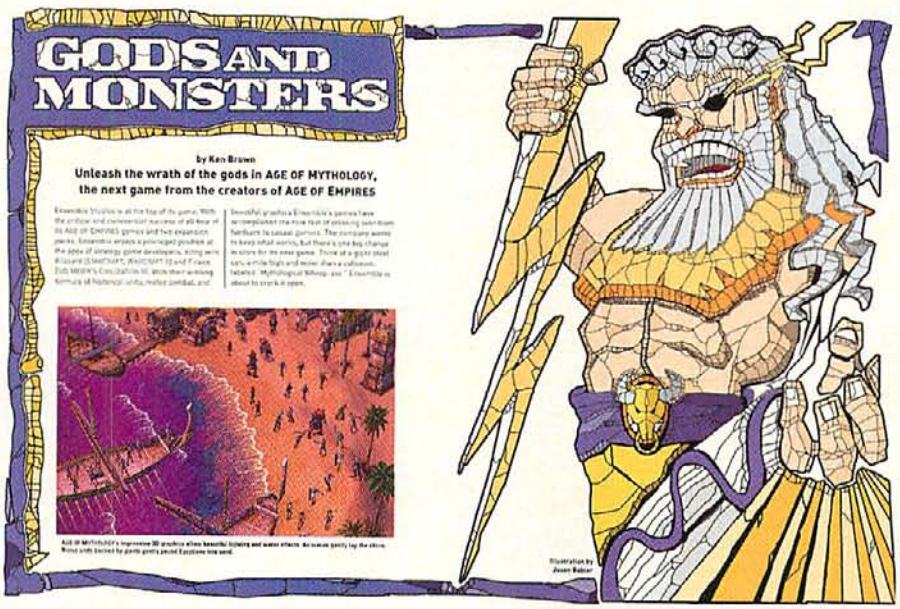
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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

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GEORGE JONES

Playing With Feeling



"Can a computer game make you cry? We don't know, but we're going to find out."

An Electronic Arts ad posited this question back in the '80s, and if anything it's become more thought-provoking over time. As movies demonstrate, eliciting emotional reactions is still the signature of a good story-driven project.

Except in computer games. More often than not, games tend to focus on making us laugh. As in other visual media, this is perhaps the easiest reaction to shoot for. Other "easy" emotional reactions include fear, greed, and in some extremely buggy instances, frustration.

It's no big deal, really. There's enough sorrow in other media. Plus, creating tears in an interactive environment seems daunting. What computer games *should* do more of, however, is allow us to provoke our emotions and thoughts through our own actions.

Enter games like BLACK & WHITE, reviewed on page 74. Right from the start it gets you thinking about faith and religion with the kind of raw emotional lead-in that's far more typical of movies than of digital entertainment.

Are you going to cry when you play BLACK & WHITE? Probably not. But there's more of a chance you will than with any other game on the market, because your actions have an impact on the game itself. You may laugh when you beat your creature for five minutes straight, but the game does not take the easy, sarcastic, and humorous way out of the occasionally serious themes it brings up. Nor does it allow you to.

■ ■ ■

Interestingly, BLACK & WHITE also revitalizes one of the long-lost arts of game design: the reward as a fundamental game mechanism.

For a long time, rewards were a Pavlovian incentive. As you kept playing a game, you kept reaping benefits, be they level-up powers in traditional RPGs, titles or land or marriage in PIRATES, or just animated movies or cut-scenes.

Now, unfortunately, we're spoiled. Cut-scenes and increasing powers are taken for granted, creating a need for more inspired reward mechanisms. We play games for fun, but we need incentives to keep going. Open-ended titles like THE SIMS (gaming's John the Evangelist to BLACK & WHITE's Jesus) and BLACK & WHITE can accomplish this more easily, but other games and genres—including action games—should be able to do it as well. When will they? I'm curious to hear about the more interesting reward systems you've encountered.

Email George at george_jones@ziffdavis.com.

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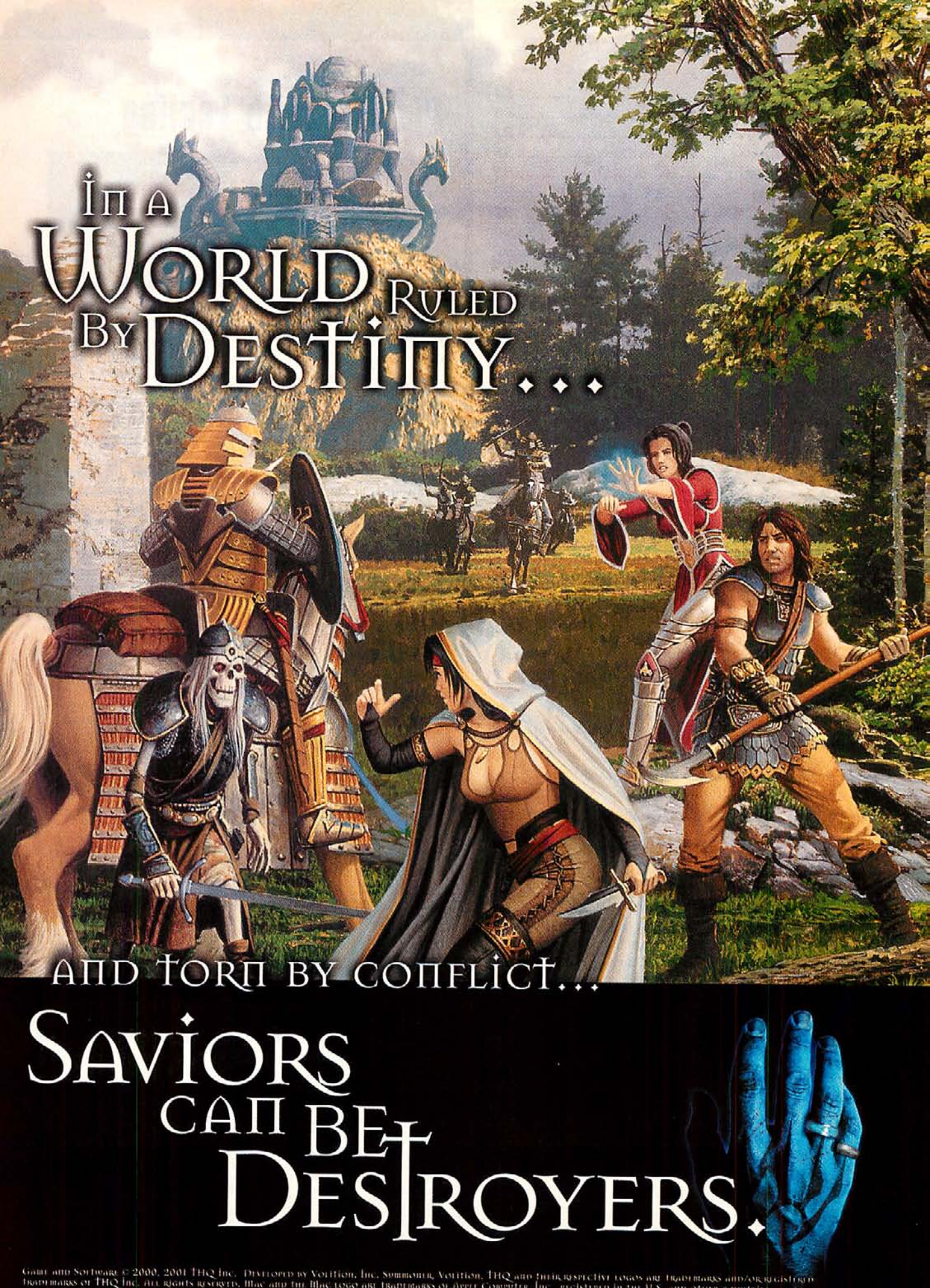
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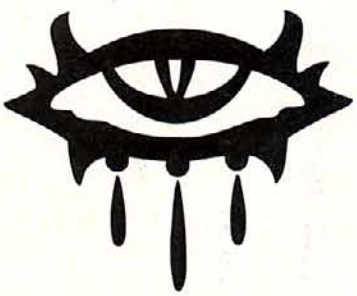


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LETTERS

CGW: They Love Us, They Hate Us

I had been a subscriber to *CGW* from about 1989 to 1998. While I had only picked up a few issues since then (including the last two), I was reminded again as to how far *CGW* has deteriorated. I picked up the 200th issue and even though I admit it was, for the most part, well done, it was ruined by the unnecessary inclusion of the G.O.D. CD. The CIV III issue [May 2001], however, was back to the usual unprofessionalism and immaturity (except for the CIV III article). Your publisher, Lee Uniacke, stated that "87 percent of our readership...are 17 years old and over." (page 13). Yet a good deal of the elements in the latest issue seem to be written toward an audience of 12 to 13 year olds. These include the stupid tongue-in-cheek comment that "...when bribing us with drug paraphernalia, have the sense to include some actual drugs" (page 32); "10 colossal games" that seem they would only appeal to non-adults (page 60); and of course, where you used to have insightful columns on the last page, we now get a man purposefully writing as or to a pre-teen (page 128). It's just not worth picking up *CGW* anymore, at any price.

Steve Clark

I have been reading *CGW* since about 1986, so I can say with some authority that *CGW* is the best gaming magazine around. I have picked up some of the others from time to time, and they never even compare to the sincere, heart-felt reviews that you guys have given over the years. If *CGW* contains some "negative reviews," according to Bruce Rolston [Reviews Opener, May 2001], then that must be because you are reviewing some pretty bad games. I have come to rely on *CGW*'s reviews over the years to make sure that I don't throw my hard-earned money away on crap that's going to just sit on my hard drive. I have found out too many times the hard way that I should have waited to see what you guys had to say about a game before I bought it.

You guys are hilarious, well-spoken, educational, and an inspiration to us "old folks" who still game. I am 30 years old (almost 31), and I hope to be gaming when I'm 70.

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Three Nice Tries

I read your Letters section in your April 2001 issue and all I have to say is: If I condemn you to hell and the devil, like E. Leon and Sandra Holderby, will you send me three great games? Hopefully,

Philip Kaskela

Re: E. Leon and Sandra Holderby's Letter of the Month: Hey, I hate you guys too. How about some free loot?

William Hunter

In response to E. Leon and Sandra Holderby's letter: So, if I say I am against killing in video games and denounce your magazine as the devil itself will I to get a free copy of SOLDIER OF FORTUNE?

SincerelyRonney Kandah

Look everyone, if we started passing out free games to everyone who hated us, we'd go out of business. Just think how many games we'd have to give away in Canada alone!

Keep up the great work. Some of us do appreciate what you're doing.

Mike Garland, Gaming For Eternity

Too Cool for School?

This is in response to Ken Brown's article about how colleges are refusing to create video game majors ["Too Cool For School," Read.Me, April 2001]. I too want to be a video game designer, and faced the problem of finding a school that would be a "good enough" fit for computer games. I am currently a freshman at Columbia College of Chicago, majoring in a program called Interactive multimedia. While it is not a study devoted to video games, much of what we learn has to do with the production of interactive software, and you can't get more interactive than a video game. With any luck, universities will see video games as an art, if not a lucrative business to teach.

Pinstripewilly42

PC Gaming: Not Dead Yet!

I think you guys are being too hard on the "PC is going downhill" idea. I came from the other end of the spectrum. I am

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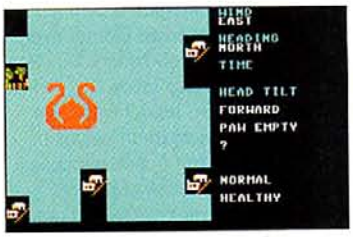
17 now and I started Nintendo at age 4. For about 12 of the 13 years, I was a console gamer – started with the Nintendo and I still have my PlayStation. Where is it now? My sister's room! I saved up for 4 months and I got me a PC you guys would consider sad. (P-III 833 TNT2...you can laugh now.) But you know what? I love it. I have played more UT than any of my N64 shooters COMBINED. One of my friends tried UT and after that he told me he could never look at GOLDENEYE the same way again. Now he's saving up for a computer! As the console crowd gets older, they will move on to the PC. So, don't worry, the PC will always be there. Hell, NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES with my TNT2 amazes me every day. Keep it up!

Aaron Bruno

Crush, Crumble, & Chomp

You guys are morons and/or newbie gamers. Your dream game "Monsters" has been made [May 2001]. Being 16, I know you guys are older then me. But why do I get the feeling I've been a gamer longer? I played my father's Commodore 64 when I was like 4. And there was a game called CRUSH, CRUMBLE & CHOMP on that machine, where you choose a pre-made monster or create your own and choose special abilities and stats for it. Then you destroy as much of the city as possible before the scientist or the army kills you.

Erluti



CRUSH, CRUMBLE & CHOMP for the C64.

We received a few letters reminding us about CRUSH, CRUMBLE, & CHOMP. Since we are not newbies, we're going to go with your first guess: We are morons.

He Thinks LINKS Stinks

Thank you, thank you, thank you. As PC games editor for an online company, my faith in your staff's cognitive powers regarding Game of the Year accolades has been reaffirmed [April 2001]. Specifically, this year, in your sports choices – not so much for what you chose as the best, but for what you didn't include as a finalist: LINKS 2001. The inclusion of PGA CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF is a wonderful lesson in attentiveness. Rarely has such an underdeveloped, poorly planned, incomplete and ridiculously overly hyped game as LINKS 2001 been rushed out the door just to meet a Christmas rush – over 200 bug fixes so far and still counting, not to mention a 4-month wait to get a course converter that should have been top priority for "the most significant release in a decade." The publisher's own hype was bad enough, but to have several major market magazines ballyhoo the game as the second coming was just too much. Here's hoping that reviewers everywhere begin to actually play the games they review and stop using the developer's press kit for information before their thoughts hit the page. Keep up the great work,

Michael L. House

You Lost Us on Number Three

Four comments on Issue 201:

1. Letter of the Month: Dear E. Leon and Sandra Holderby, please, go to hell.

2. Canadian Corner: I am a Canadian. Having read your past few issues I have come to one inescapable conclusion: Canadians, for the most part, are anal jackasses. Learn to laugh, you're all embarrassing me.

3. Jeff Green: I love this man. I love how he thinks. I love how he writes. When we start cloning humans, let's start with Jeff Green. Failing that, I'll carry his love child to ensure the continuation of the blood line. I'm sure his wife won't mind.

4: *CGW* as a whole: Good work. Here's to another 200 issues.

Stacy "*Remember 1812? Don't make us come down there*" Ross
Edmonton, Alberta

Norwegian Corner!

Referring to page 75 of the excellent April 2001 issue of *CGW*, Adventure Game of the Year: THE

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LETTERS

LONGEST JOURNEY. I have to let you know about the terrible mistake in this paragraph: "....Funcom's THE LONGEST JOURNEY. This Danish import..." Now, I like the Danes as much as the next Norwegian (it's the whole Viking thing; I'm sure you understand), but Funcom is a Norwegian game company, and thus THE LONGEST JOURNEY is a Norwegian import, not Danish, as your article stated. Please correct this in the next issue, or I'll be forced to send my elite force of Norwegian berserker-moose on you. You don't want that, let me tell you. Those things can trample a Volkswagen flat in a matter of seconds...;)

Ken Christensen
A Norwegian in Colorado

Oops. Sorry about that, Norway. Computer Gaming World: alienating the entire planet, one nation at a time!



Okay, Then. Just Follow These Men in the White Suits....

Bread is good. I like bread. It's all good tasting and stuff. White, wheat, sourdough...MMM! I like seafood too, but fish and little kids isn't as fun as bread and little kids. Eat bread, wear bread, live bread.

Brian

It's All About Landon

Man, this sucks. I bought like 10 games this year and none of them got one of your Game of the Year awards. Could you guys have the following games as the winners for next year: BLACK & WHITE, EMPIRE EARTH, the DIABLO II expansion, and any other game I plan to buy. And yes I am whining because you didn't pick any of my games.

Have fun (and you better pick my games or else),

Landon Neale

Canadian Corner: Special Deluxe Edition

EDITOR'S NOTE: Ay caramba. Our smart-ass remarks about Canada have turned into a full-blown International Incident. We received more letters about the Canadian Corner than about any actual game. Don't worry, we're almost done with this now. Group hug, everyone!



This is in reply to all the letters from Canadians complaining about the stereotyping in *CGW*'s Letters section. Come on Canucks! Come clean! Admit it – we DO live in igloos! However, even though we live in igloos, it does not mean we are not wired. Attached please find a picture of my home in Canada's capital, Ottawa.

Gotta go – my back bacon's burning, eh!

Chris Koebel
Ottawa, Canada

It is with absolute disgust I read your Letters section in the May 2001 issue. I cannot believe a mass-distribution publication of your caliber would let its editorial staff sink to such a level to incite bigotry and to use ethnic slurs. Once you have driven away all Canadian readers, will you begin picking on individual states or ethnic minorities in your own country? Your action at *CGW* has made me promise to myself to never ever again purchase any Ziff-Davis product or publication, and to make others aware of the ignorant behavior and sophomoric style of your editors.

Olaf Karls
Ontario, Canada

MY oh my. What is it with the Anglo Canadians??? I knew they were different from us French-speaking ones, but come on! Can't you guys take a little humor? Gee whiz, there are a lot of deadly serious Canadian gamers out there! I myself laughed a lot reading the staff remarks but even more so reading the feedback! Are you Canadians really serious???

Keep up the good work.

Michel Charette
Montreal

Congratulations. You just lost another Canadian subscriber. When my subscription expires, so does my interest in your rag. Good day.

Mike Stafford

If you can't take a joke, you need to get a life. You won't lose me as a reader for making fun of us frozen Canadians who take a dogsled to the post office once a week to get our mail.

Robert Maissan

Canada is the best place in the world to live in. The world loves us, but hates you. Did you know that 57% of you patriotic Americans sew a CANADIAN flag on your bookbags when you go to another country! Now, you Americans may have a better army then us, but if you ever even considered attacking us you would have the whole world breathing down your neck. So next time you even think about writing bad things about Canada, realize we're tougher (hockey), better loved around the world, smarter (half your children can't even find their own state on the map), and all around better. Let's see you print this in your magazine you bunch of pansies. (Oh right, you're Americans – of course you won't.)

P.S. This Canadian could kick all your asses in any game.

Graham Smith

Don't listen to 'em, *CGW*, keep up the Canada bashing.

Eric Loffeld

I hate your magazine anymore [sic], every damn issue has some remark about Canadians and our country. At least out [sic] PrimeMinister has an IQ of over 14 and does something for our damn country. I hope, no i know the other Canadians are behind me when i say: YOU IGNORANT SELF-CENTERED asses, get your heads on straight or you will loose [sic] more than just my subscription, which by the way you have already lost. Maybe I will go to a magazine with some integrity and whose reviews actually mean something, not the filthy rubbish that you enter into your magazine. Hell PC-Accelertor [sic] was better than your magazine.

Your former subscriber,
Craig Munro
Ottawa, Canada

I am a big fan of your magazine, and also Canadian. I read the Canadian Corner every month, and I find it extremely hilarious! I don't understand why all of these fellow Canadians are getting so mad. I find them very funny. It offends me more to see all of these other Canadians get upset, because it shows that we have no sense of humor, which most of us do! I will continue to read the Canadian Corner, and laugh, until either you stop doing it (which I hope you won't) or until I die.

Cameron McGuinness
Arthur, Ontario

What is wrong with you? Canada is a great land filled with great people! Stop it before you further embarrass yourself.

Guy Meyer
Centennial, Colorado

I had to drop you a quick note after reading Nicholas Yakimchuk's letter in the Canadian Corner section [May 2001]. Hey Nic – lighten up. My wife hails from LiverPool, Nova Scotia. She can take a ribbing with the best of them AY!!!! So break out some Captain Morgans spiced rum, heat up some smoked kippers, maybe a blood sausage or two, then sit back and read the Letters section.

As for *CGW*, I think the Canadian Corner is a MUST-have. Again, Nic, thanks for a great laugh.

Ken Hall

I am sick and tired of you guys making fun of Canada! We don't live in igloos, we don't eat "funny bacon," and we are not all fur trappers and lumberjacks! Oh yeah, and just so you know, we have a show up here called "Talking to Americans" where a Canadian goes around the U.S. asking you guys about Canada. He asks questions like "Would you like to congratulate Canada on becoming part of North America?" or "Did you hear that Canada just legalized staplers?" and Americans actually believe him. So think about that next time you call us stupid.

Michael Dwilow

As an avid gamer, I enjoy reading your magazine for various previews, reviews, and most importantly, letters. I thoroughly enjoy reading them and hearing what others have to say, whether they are valid opinions or not. I can easily say that out of all of them I love reading the Canadian letters. As a Canadian, I find myself laughing at them more then agreeing with them. I don't understand how some people can get so upset with your comments. I am a patriotic Canadian like the next person, but give me a break! I enjoy your moose jokes, eh? Anyway, I just think that some people should lighten up in the future.

P. S. While I myself am not a mountie, my father is.

Sean Dugger
London, ON, Canada

You guys down there in the States pick on us like a bigger brother picks on a smaller sibling. When one considers this relationship, it's kinda like the relationships over at the *CGW* offices. The United States are like the majority of the editors, while Canada takes the place of Jeff Green. We're the little guy, the underdog, the loser. The lovable, intelligent loser, but the loser nonetheless. We both have flaws and it is okay to make fun of those flaws, because we all have perks as well. So there is no real reason for anyone but a die-hard, stuffed-shirt patriot to get angry when his country is made fun of, because most of us who are able to call ourselves sane know that it is all in fun.

Lucan McRandall

In regards to all your bad-mouthing of Canadians, I'd like to say a word in their defense. Have you ever seen that movie *Strange Brew*? That has to be one of the funniest movies I have ever seen! While I don't think that it was made by Canadians, I must say that Rick Moranis and that other guy who plays his brother do an awesome job of portraying a couple of beer-drinking, doughnut eating hosers who must save the world from the evil Brewmeister Smith and his sinister plan to control the minds of the world with his specially made beer. I would go so far as to say that this movie is the Canadians' best representation in America, and that this movie ranks right up there with *Monty Python* and *Dumb and Dumber*.

P.S. MY TOE HURTS!!

Jacob Gucker

Man, I'm getting sick and tired of all these so-called Canadians writing in to bitch and moan about the way they're treated by your magazine. As a born-and-bred Canadian with Molson's and maple syrup running through my veins, I'd like to point out that most of us north of the 49th are not as humor-deficient as people like Nicky R. and Darius N. The majority of us are relaxed, laid back, and capable of seeing your cheap shots for what they are: expressions of your love for and admiration of all things Canadian. And you know what? We love you Americans, too. The only real difference between our great nations is we make fun of you guys behind your backs instead of to your faces. Y'know, to be polite and everything. Keep up the good work.

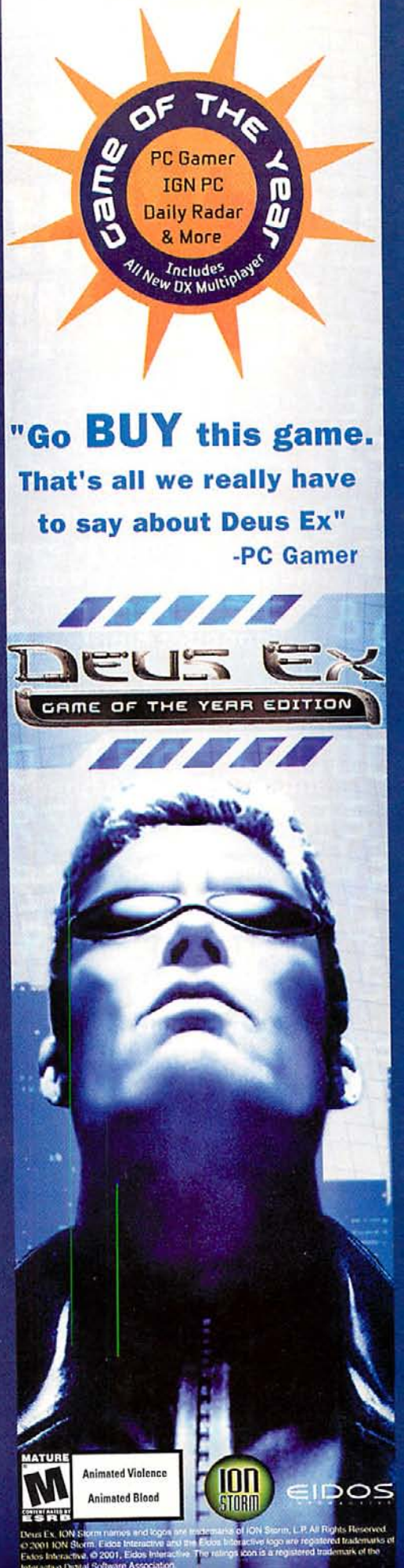
P.S. We're still really, really sorry about Celine Dion. Please don't hold her against us.

Steve Tilley
Edmonton, Canada

I think this whole shebang proves that the French are the root of all evil! Think about it: If the French hadn't screwed around up in Canuck-land, then it would probably have become part of the United States. It's really those darn Frenchies' fault. We shouldn't be blaming the Canadians; we should blame the French!

Daniel Harrison

Let us finish with Canada first, Daniel. Then we'll take on the French.



THERE'S NOTHING CONVENTIONAL ABOUT IT.

Plunge back into intense World War II combat with the most realistic tactical and strategic action game ever created. Maneuver Sergeant "Tiny" McHale and his elite squad of soldiers deep behind enemy lines utilizing their combined expertise to set up ambushes, control troops and conduct night missions.

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COMMANDOS® 2

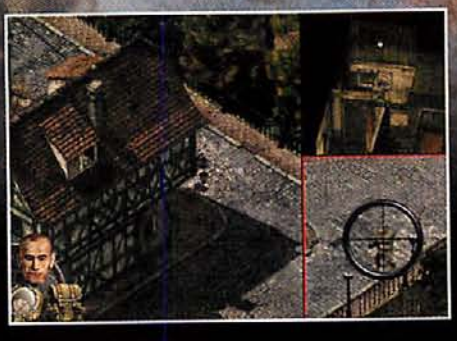
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Disney Interactive

RP

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HOT SHOTS

THE TOP 10 GAMES WE WANT TO SEE AT E3*

*Excluding games we're previewing this month, games we previewed last month, and booth babes. E3 is the Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles (May 17-19), 48 straight hours of games, booze, taxis, loud music, and shirts caked with vomit.



Shlan Warrior

Unreal II

■■■ It's going to be behind closed doors, it's more than a year away, and it's neck and neck with RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN as the shooter we most want to see at E3. Since our exclusive first look in April, more details about UNREAL II have come out. Players will have some limited control over AI squadmates. Levels are being designed around the concept of the gamer as a small player in a much larger conflict in which the lines between sides aren't always clearly drawn. We can't wait to see how Legend has built upon the gameplay since we saw the game at last year's show.



Aliens vs. Predator 2

■■■ So the question is this: Which Monolith will be making the sequel to ALIENS VS. PREDATOR? Will it be the Monolith responsible for last year's best action game, NO ONE LIVES FOREVER? Or will it be the Monolith guilty of SANITY: AIKEN'S ARTIFACT (last seen languishing in an EBX bargain bin for $2.99)? We're counting on E3 to clear up that little mystery. But we're decidedly optimistic—NOLF proved unequivocally that Monolith is capable of delivering a stellar title. And it helps that the shortcomings of the first game seem to be addressed by the AVP2 features we know about: indoor and outdoor environments, a heightened presence of the films' signature elements (wait until you see the hydraulic lifters from *Aliens*), more variety in lighting and pacing, and a user-friendly save system. Throw in the dazzling graphics showcased in these screenshots and you can be certain we'll be making a beeline to Monolith's booth as soon as the E3 doors open.







Planetside

■■■ It's not so much that we're dying to *see* PLANETSIDE—we've seen it and it looks great. What we want to do is *play* PLANETSIDE and we're crossing our fingers, wishing on eyelashes, and praying to our pagan gods that the reigning massively multiplayer king Sony Online (*née* Verant Interactive) will have a playable version of this sprawling online bloodbath ready and waiting for us. With light RPG elements and some meaty team-oriented campaigns riveted onto a fast, graphically dazzling engine, PLANETSIDE could permanently up the ante for online shooters.



WarCraft III

■■■ The four playable races have been finalized, the balance of role-playing and real-time strategy gameplay elements has been decided, and legions of slobbering fans are waiting anxiously—all that's left to do is actually build the game. And that's what we're hoping a big-time E3 presentation will deliver: gameplay, gameplay, and more gameplay. This is arguably the most anticipated title of the year, but Blizzard will need to use the big show to wow the press and show that the hype and anticipation are merited. We'll let you know if the game promises to play as sharp as these screenshots look.



Infogrames and Spellbound Present

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THE POSSE THAT SLAYS TOGETHER STAYS TOGETHER.

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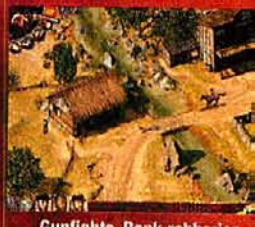
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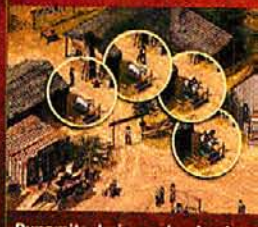
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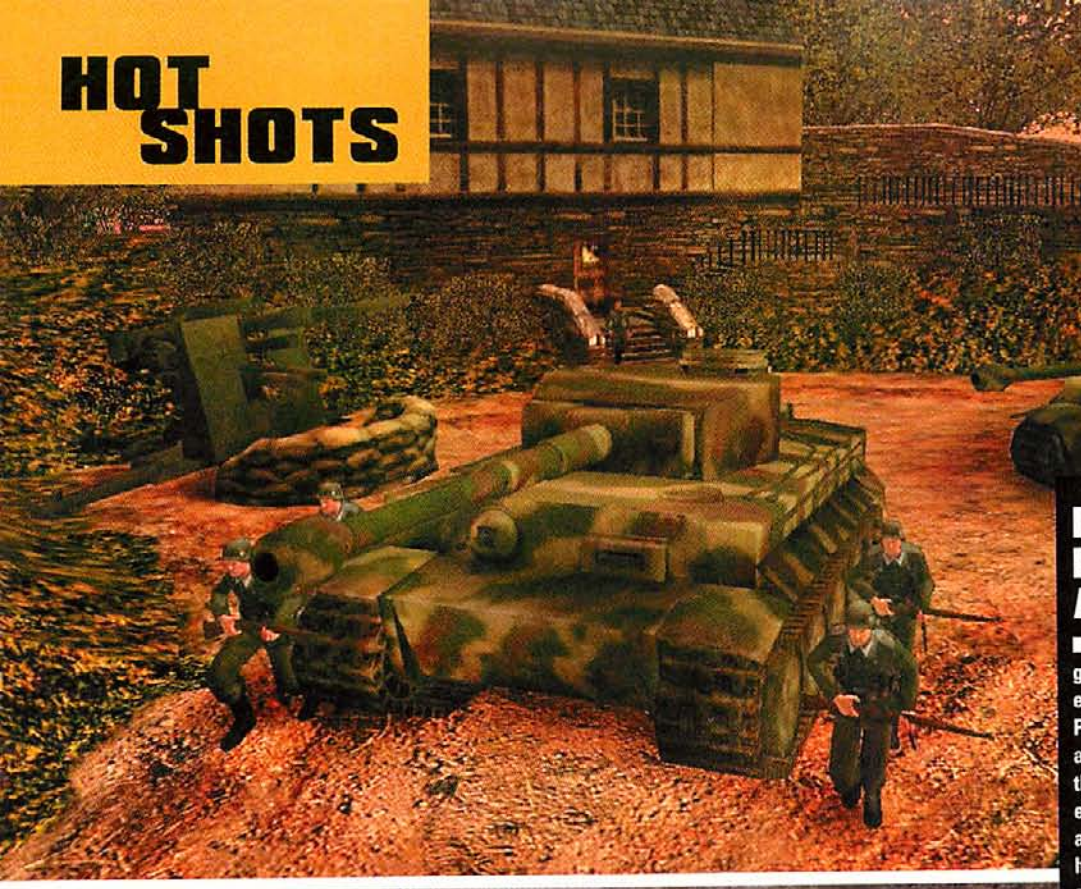
Spellbound

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HOT SHOTS



Medal of Honor: Allied Assault

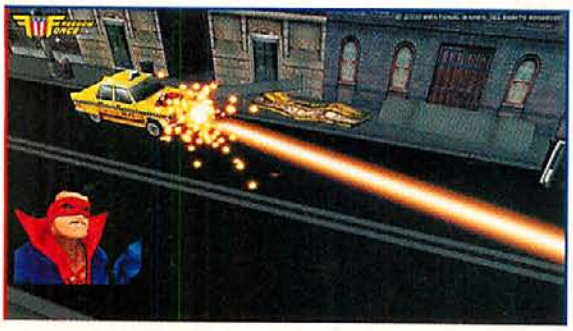
■■■ We've got high hopes for this game, whose storied predecessor earned numerous awards on the PlayStation. It comes closer than anything we've seen to re-creating the World War II combat experience, from surviving the landings at Omaha Beach to seizing and holding the bridge at Remagen (the subject of *A Bridge Too Far*). We're so gung-ho to see this game we're not going to wait for E3—see our full, hands-on playtest next month.



Neverwinter Nights

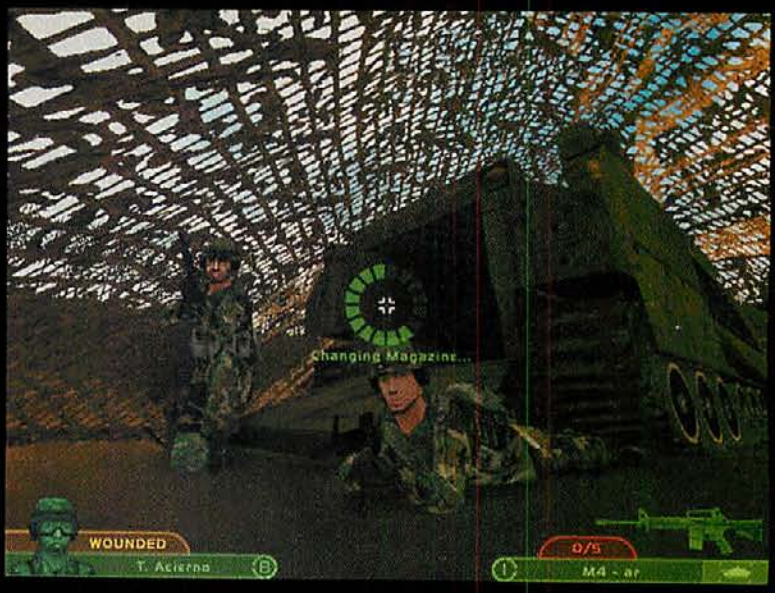
■■■ Bioware's upcoming D&D extravaganza is shaping up to be one of *the* big role-playing events of the past few years. The Edmonton geniuses have already proven their talents in BALDUR'S GATE I and II (as well as in MDK2). And now, with NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, they are creating what may be no less than the holy grail of hardcore role-playing fans: multiplayer modules, created by either Bioware or any amateur Dungeon Master in the world with the imagination, that will simulate a real-life D&D session perhaps better than any game has before. That's a lot of hype, to be sure, but do not underestimate Bioware. The brains there are so big it's scary.

HOT SHOTS



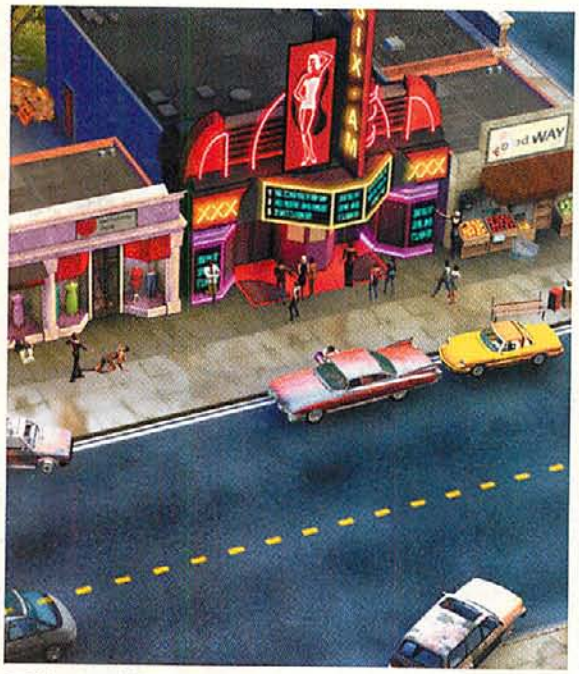
Freedom Force

■■■ It's part comic book, part X-COM, and entirely intriguing. The big question, though, is can the guys at Irrational pull off the previously impossible task of making a great superhero game? E3 will be a strong indicator of whether *CGW*'s February cover subject will succeed. Based on what we saw in early December, we still think the answer is yes. The combination of '60s-era Marvel style, the free-form strategy elements, and the designers' love for the comics genre should prove unbeatable.



Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon

■■■ We're itching to get our trigger fingers on GHOST RECON, Red Storm's first squad-based tactical shooter since 1999's phenomenal RAINBOW SIX: ROGUE SPEAR. Boasting a new 3D engine, GHOST RECON will put you in charge of a squad focused on covert ops and international peacekeeping missions—most of which tend to get FUBAR. Sometimes your team will operate independently, other times you'll have assistance from tanks, helicopters, and close air support. The missions involve recon, demolitions, base raids, and pilot search and rescue. Will it be as big an improvement over ROGUE SPEAR as that game was over RAINBOW SIX? We'll see at E3.



SimsVille

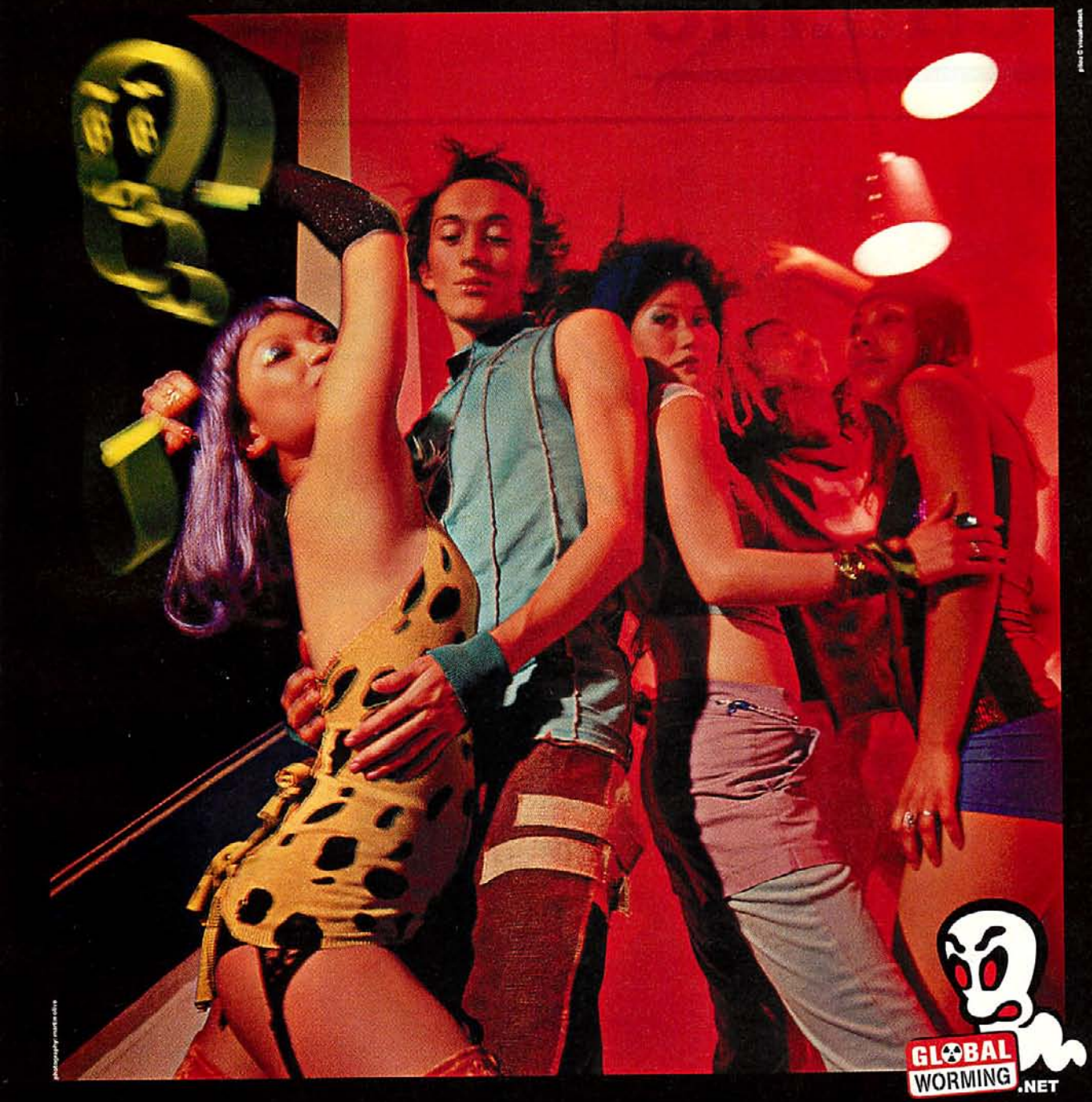
■■■ Suburban utopia or urban blight? This is a bigger, potentially nastier sandbox from the good folks who brought you THE SIMS. Frankly, we had a few doubts about this game when we first saw it at last year's E3—how could holding parades and attracting Italian restaurants for a small town hold anyone's interest for very long? Then we got these screens. Check it out: Is that or is that not a prostitute soliciting a date from a passing car in front of the X-rated movie theatre? Suddenly, the potential gameplay of SIMSVILLE became a whole lot clearer in the fevered minds of the *CGW* pimp daddies. With luck, we'll be able to check out the as-yet-unveiled SIMS ONLINE as well.



Empire Earth

■■■ EMPIRE EARTH is nothing if not ambitious. Imagine playing a game of AGE OF EMPIRES that didn't stop in the Iron Age, but kept on going through the Renaissance, Industrial Age, Postindustrial Age, and into the future, with mechanized warfare, ICBMs, satellite weapons, and advanced fighters operating from aircraft carriers. Can an RTS still be playable when close-range weaponry gives way to nuclear missiles and plasma cannons? We're not sure, but a game of this scope sure deserves a closer look. Tune in next month for an in-depth, hands-on report.

STOP PLAYING





Dreamcast™

PC CD

EVERYONE E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Animated Violence
Mild Language

TITUS

TEAM 17

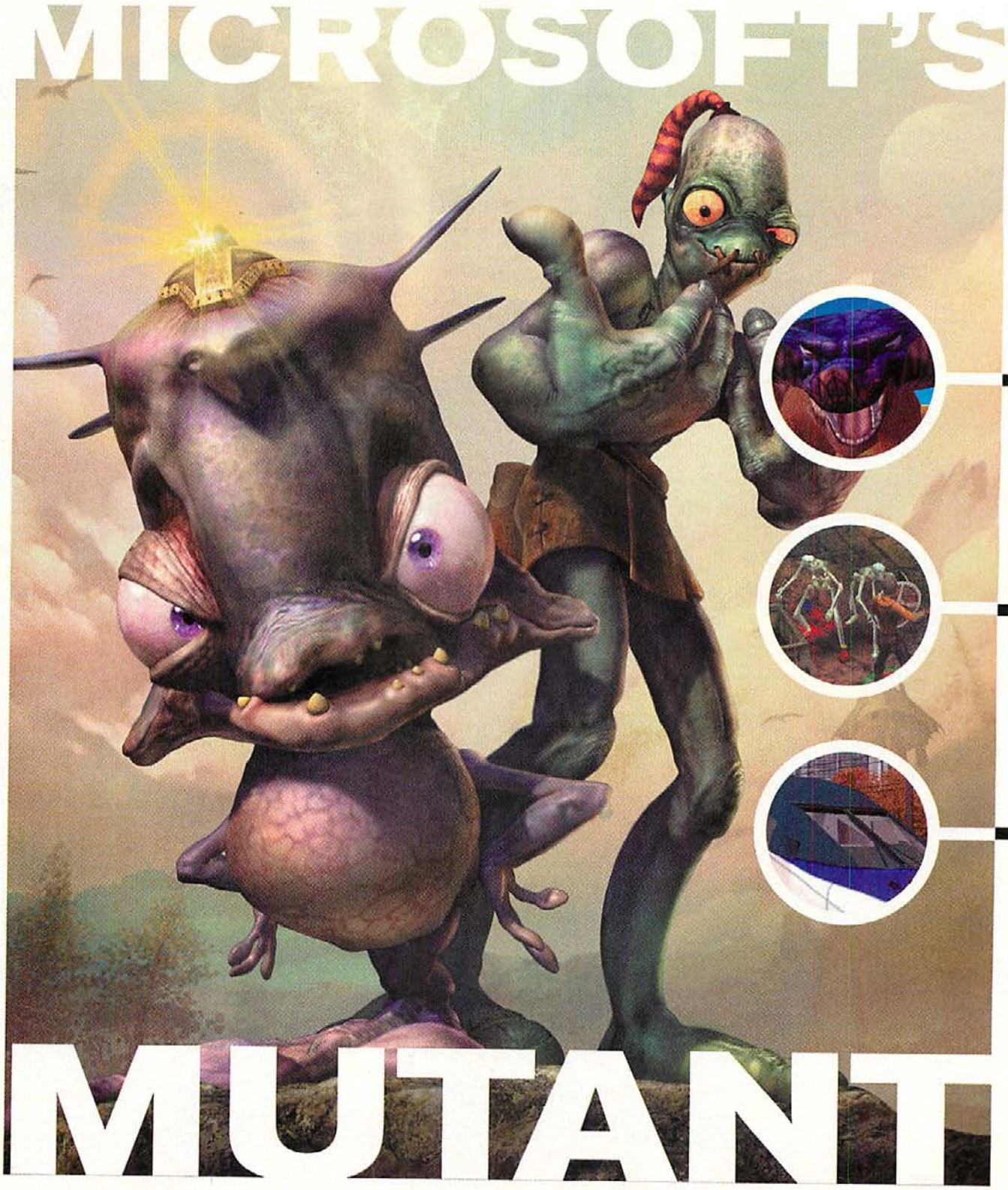
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read.me

Inside

Test-driving TROPICO
Gaming offline: the best new books
Game of the Year Reality Check



ODDWORLD'S MUNCH MAY BE AN UNLIKELY HERO FOR MICROSOFT. MOST XBOX GAMES FAIL TO IMPRESS; THE PC LINEUP LOOKS STRONG.

This year the big story of Gamestock—Microsoft's annual editor's day deluxe—was the Xbox. This was the first chance for gaming media types like ourselves to get a real hands-on look at it, and the highly biased PC-centric consensus opinion of the *CGW* editors in attendance: eh. Sure it was impressive graphically, especially MUNCH'S ODDYSEE and HALO (although according to Microsoft Games president Ed Fries, what we were seeing was running on only half the processing power of the final Xbox). But the overall lineup was lackluster. HALO, a game we've been drooling over since E3 '99, was particularly disappointing, having morphed from an ambitious team-based multiplayer combat game to a straightforward alien shooter. Yawn.

BEST OF THE BUNCH



Sigma: The Adventures of Rex Chance

Alex Garden's new game looks like a simple concept: an RTS set on the island of Dr. Moreau. But factor in the hundreds of different animal combinations that you as player/mad scientist can create, then wield as a grotesque army, and you've got potential for a lot of fun and creativity. Expect to see a lot more of SIGMA in the months to come. In the meantime, see our preview on page 56.



Dungeon Siege

If you saw our preview last month, you know why people are calling Chris Taylor's fantasy RPG a DIABLO-killer. DUNGEON SIEGE takes the best the genre has to offer—hack-and-slash combat in the dankest dungeons—and improves on it by eliminating level loads and offering multiple paths to victory and a powerful scenario editor. On top of that, it's a visual feast. Did we mention the medieval miniguns?



Train Simulator

If you love trains (as many people do) you'll want this game. Nay, you'll need it. Understand, this is not a virtual train set, but an actual simulation of real-world trains and their routes re-created in amazing detail. Everything from the rivets on the steam boiler to the signal flags to the place settings in the dining cars has been lovingly rendered. This sim could be a huge hit as well as a lot of dorky fun.

Like every Gamestock, the show kicked off with a slam-bang B roll of all the games we'd be seeing set to some rocking soundtrack, followed by a rousing speech from Ed Fries. No one talks good game like Ed, and his speech is usually one of the highlights of the show. Fries said he is challenging game developers to have "a strong story, great characters and [a desire to] reach our audience on an emotional level as well as an intellectual one." We agree that those are the key elements of great game design. But the extent to which the games we saw accomplished that is another story.

continued on page 34

The GOOD...

$10 EVERQUEST

If you've never experienced the pleasures of playing with your elf, what are you waiting for? Sony dropped the price on EVERQUEST to $10 in March, trying to lure an even bigger crowd to the temptations of Norrath. This means "EverCrack" has finally matched the price of a vial of the real thing.



the BAD...

TRIBES II

It's not that it's a bad game, but after three years in development we expected TRIBES II to run properly upon its release. It didn't. Numerous reports of bugs, slow performance, and multiplayer problems have tarnished the franchise's reputation and made us ask once again: Why was it impossible to hold this game until it was thoroughly playtested?



and the UGLY

DEVELOPER DUMPING

The recent economic downturn has hit game developers especially hard. Electronic Arts laid off the entire staff (80) of ULTIMA ONLINE 2 and canceled the project, effectiv ely abdicating massively multiplayer online role-playing to EVERQUEST and STAR WARS GALAXIES (until EA can launch THE SIMS ONLINE). Interplay and Sierra laid off many of the developers of FALLOUT TACTICS and TRIBES 2 after those games shipped. Some reward for finishing your game—a pink slip.



"Does anybody feel like losin' a game to me?"

What's Hot What's Not

First with the HOT...

- MUNCH'S ODDYSEE—the one reason to get an Xbox.
- Alex Garden's ego. (Sizzling!)
- The NFL FEVER franchise lives.
- That game with the choo-choos.
- Lorne Lanning's voice work in the MUNCH'S ODDYSEE demo. So that's where Abe's voice comes from!



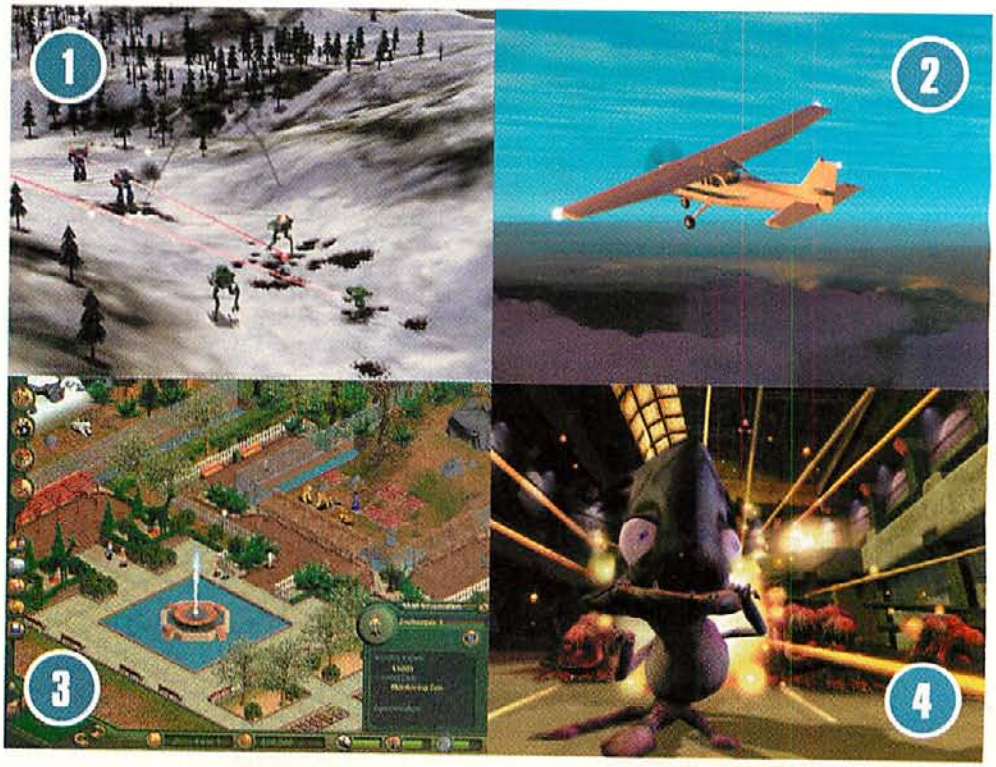
- Sierra's after-party, featuring Wil O'Neal in a dress, kissing one of the IGN guys on the mouth. 'Nuff said.

then with the NOT...

- HALO. Let's hope the PC version offers more.



- NFL FEVER will be Xbox-only.
- Xbox games excluding MUNCH. Really, we weren't that impressed.
- The annual trivia contest. Sure, Chris Taylor was funny as the emcee (keep them cocaine and masturbation jokes coming, buddy!) but the questions were too damn hard and the Experience Music Project can't hold a candle to the seedy bar that hosted last year's festivities.



1. MECHCOMMANDER 2's detailed animations highlight the Mechs' explosive firepower. 2. The crowded skies of FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2002 will require you to request clearance for taxiing, take-off, and landing. In addition to unrivaled graphics quality, the game will feature new aircraft like the Boeing 747, enhanced cockpits, and real-time 3D scenery generation. 3. Microsoft hopes to tap into the success of simulations like ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON and SIM THEMEPARK with ZOO TYCOON, which lets you build and manage a menagerie of 40 animals. Here's one game you won't want to play with iSmell. 4. MUNCH'S ODDYSEE plays out in gorgeous 3D environments, with many ABE'S ODDYSEE creatures returning to try to devour Abe and his puny new pal, Munch.

continued from page 33

After Ed's presentation, the designers of each game (PC games first, Xbox second) showed their stuff. The theme of the day for the speakers must have been "entertainment." It began with Alex Garden beating his chest like the huge croco-rilla on the screen behind him and ended with a little white guy trying to imitate a Vince Carter slam dunk.

But that's okay, because the real meat is after lunch when the games are set up in a room with PCs grouped in the center and TVs with hidden Xbox dev kits along all four walls. We spent some time checking out SIGMA and Chris Taylor's awesome DUNGEON SIEGE. The FLIGHT SIMULATOR team was showing off what looks like the most realistic civilian air sim ever. The two weirdest titles were easily MICROSOFT TRAIN SIMULATOR, an exacting re-creation of everything from 19th-century steam engines to the latest bullet trains from Japan; and ZOO TYCOON, a management sim in the SIM THEME PARK vein developed by ex-Papyrus programmers (the people who brought you NASCAR RACING).

We expected the Xbox to outshine the PC games, but that didn't happen. HALO was pretty, but playing it with the Xbox gamepad was awkward to say the least. And all the promises about team-based combat and the cool jeep with the man-able turret had gone the way of ONI's multiplayer mode. Bungie assured us that multiplayer will be an important component in the PC version (which Bungie won't even work on until HALO for Xbox ships). We'll hold our breath a bit longer.

With the exception of MUNCH'S ODDYSEE, the Xbox titles looked a little boring. They've got the requisite snowboarding game, NFL game, puzzle game, driving game, and some weird third-person action stuff. The overall impression of the platform was "wait and see," although the Sega-Microsoft alliance announced closer to press time could make the Xbox a more compelling buy.

Microsoft didn't show all of the games it's working on, so we didn't see as many PC titles as at last year's Gamestock. But with 15 PC games in development, Microsoft is hardly forsaking the PC for the Xbox. Which is good—we need as many publishers dedicated to quality PC games as we can get. CGW

Test-driving TROPICO

PopTop's banana republic sim is as addictive as real power



If you've ever wondered why doddering old dictators are unwilling to give up their rule, this game will illustrate the answer in tropical technicolor: It's good to be El Presidente. Once you seize office in PopTop's new city builder—a sort of SIMCITY in Cuba mixed with a breezy Latin beat—you'll never want to quit.

Exemplified by the game's toe-tapping salsa cinematic, which shows a military truck being robbed while a pretty accomplice distracts its driver, the game deftly combines humor, music, and American stereotypes of Latin American corruption in such an entertaining feast you can't resist joining the fun.

We played several random map scenarios, which seem to be the heart of the game. (The custom scenarios weren't yet complete.) Here you can choose from 22 autocrats (Castro, Manuel Noriega, Papa Doc Duvalier), or customize one of them with a variety of qualities and flaws. Some of the more amusing options include: Womanizer, Ugly, Alcoholic, Coward, Pompous, and even Moronic. Each has a different impact on your local popularity and appeal to Russia and the United States. Flatulence, for instance, is perceived negatively by both superpowers, and it requires bonus pay to the palace guard.

You then pick the size of your island, its population, and the richness of its resources. True to its Caribbean motif, when the game starts you'll have an abundance of resources and a scarcity of dollars. Your citizenry may start out content living in shacks, but the rabble will begin to rouse unless you provide housing, health care, entertainment, religious services, and economic opportunity. Your goal is to balance their needs, build infrastructure, and stay in power any way possible—even if you have to jail a few malcontents and rig the elections. And, of course, El Presidente must always look to his future, by stashing some funds in a Swiss bank account.

You'll find it's more difficult than you thought to build an economy while meeting basic needs, keeping a strong military, and balancing environmental concerns. But TROPICO wraps it up in such an entertaining package that—as with CIVILIZATION—you'll find yourself having to play "just one more year" to see what happens next. Combine this with beautiful graphics, catchy Latin rhythms, and a healthy sense of humor, and it's hard to see how TROPICO could miss.
—Ken Brown



Monitoring your people's needs is the key to keeping them happy. If those arrows turn red, cancel the elections and beef up the military!

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

15



June 1986

Nostalgic gamers convinced that the good old days offered more unique titles could find some ammo here. Before capital ship sims like INDEPENDENCE WAR existed, Accolade's PSI 5 TRADING COMPANY put gamers at the helm of their own cargo ship, captaining a hand-picked crew of specialists. The gameplay twist was that you had to balance your crew to both get along and perform competently. Another interesting game in the issue: THE BLACK DEATH, a depressing epidemic simulator that challenged you with surviving a plague.

10



June 1991

We noted in 1991 that the conflict in the Persian Gulf had sent sales of flight simulations soaring. With this in mind, the opportunistic minds at *CGW* decided to take a look at some of the hot new sims on the market. Leading the list was Hall of Famer FALCON 3.0. "This is not merely a game," previewer Mike Weksler enthused, "It is a complex modern air combat situational awareness simulator that may boggle beginners." How true. How many gamers bought FALCON 3.0, tried it once, and never played it again?

5



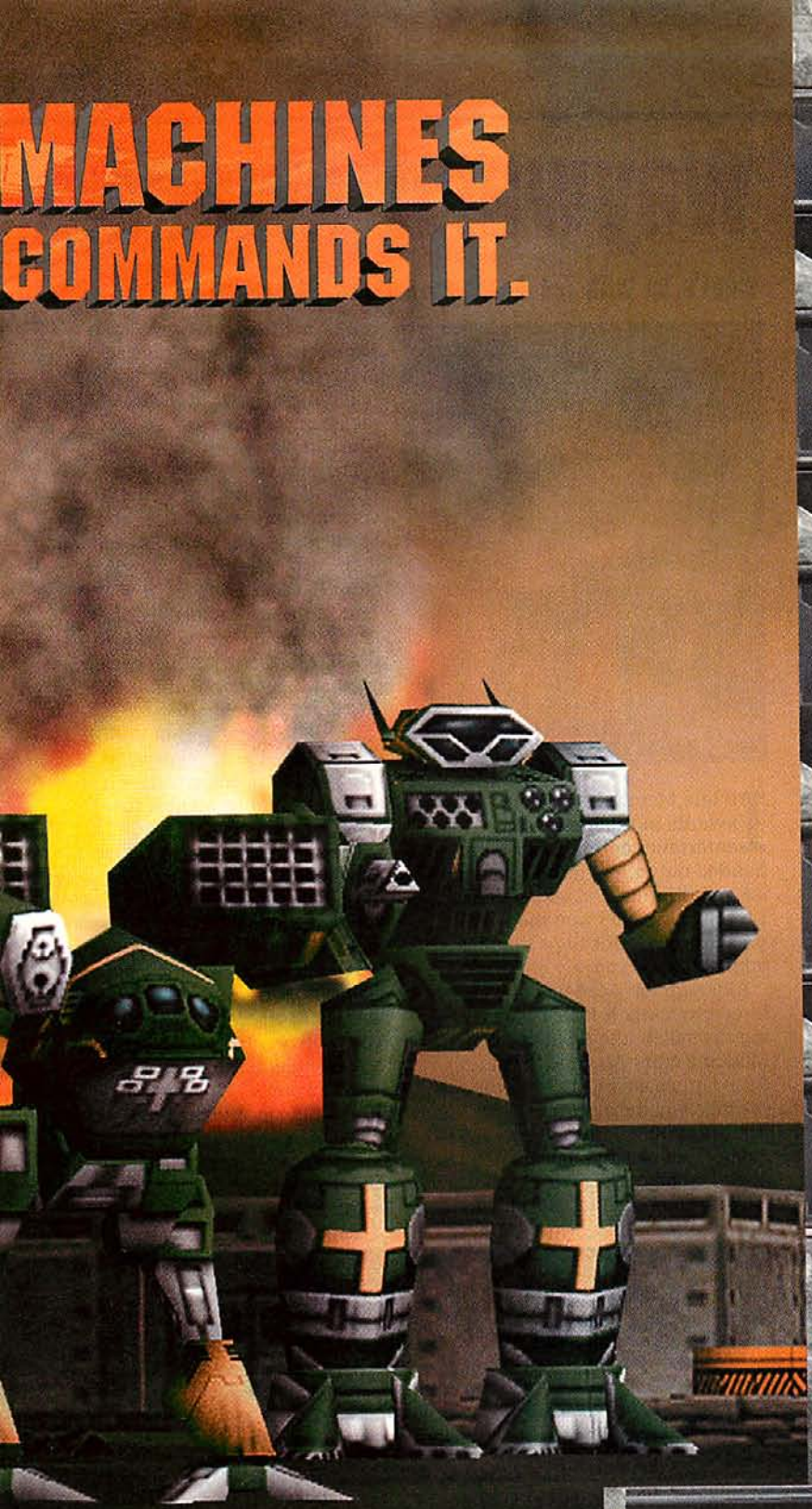
June 1996

Issue 143 may have had the ugliest cover ever, featuring an angry Ted Danson lookalike. Aesthetics aside, this issue is enough to make you appreciate our Windows world, however buggy it might be. On page 87 we detailed how to get your DOS games running in Win 95, including several sample 20-plus-line MSDOS.SYS, CONFIG.SYS, and AUTOEXEC.BAT files, which you had to type into DOS. Remember those? We've come a long way, baby.



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MECHCOMMANDER 2

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TEEN T VIOLENCE ESRB

Microsoft

THE CGW MIX
OUR LATEST OBSESSIONS

BLACK & WHITE



No game has ever put such a zap on our communal heads. People are touching their apes, Robert Coffey thinks the game is actually whispering his name, and Scooter has developed a troublesome god complex that will take years of therapy to erase. Thanks, Molyneux (no, really).

SERIOUS SAM



No moody music, no pretentious plot told through cut-scenes, no GeForce 3–enhanced graphics—SERIOUS SAM hooked us the old-fashioned way, with hordes of wild bum-rushing monsters, massive weapons, tons of secrets, and nonstop action. It's games like this that sucked us into gaming in the first place. Look for a review next issue.

PENNANT FEVER



With two reigning MVPs here in the Bay Area, baseball season's marathon drive to a Bay Bridge Series has finally begun. And as if that weren't enough, HIGH HEAT MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2002 has obsessed us for the third straight year. It's like getting a box of Crackerjack with two prizes.

GAME BOY ADVANCE

The screen is a little dark, but the GBA is still worth its weight. CASTLEVANIA and SUPER DODGEBALL FIGHTERS are taking up the majority of our time, but old-school fans may dig F-ZERO and MARIO KART ADVANCE. We'll let you know how we feel in a month.

Wayward Awards

What's up with the Academy Awards of gaming?



In late March the highest awards in the interactive entertainment industry were handed out in a nightclub in San Jose, California. Did you notice? Do you know who won the most prestigious awards in gaming? It might surprise you.

Although the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences is trying to emulate the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, its awards haven't achieved the prestige you'd expect for the "Oscars of interactive entertainment." This was the fourth annual presentation of the awards, and while a number of top developers (including Sid Meier and Lorne Lanning, at left) have gotten involved, the awards themselves don't often jibe with those of the media or gamers (see Reality Check, below).

The first surprise was DEUS EX winning Best Action/Adventure, a curious hybrid category that blocked stronger candidates in their respective genres from winning (NO ONE LIVES FOREVER, THE LONGEST JOURNEY). The Academy's RPG of the year, DIABLO II, is a debatable choice against the strength of BALDUR'S GATE II. And while the CONQUERORS expansion to AGE OF EMPIRES II is an especially strong add-on, one wonders if an add-on should be eligible for Strategy Game of the Year.

The Academy's methodology appears sound, allowing votes only from members with at least two years experience in game development. However, the $95 annual fee required for voting members may tip the balance toward large blocks of corporate members. EA, Microsoft, and Havas appear well represented in the awards.

As the games industry struggles for legitimacy, it will be incumbent on the AIAS to refine its approach before earning its place as "the Academy Awards of gaming."
—*Ken Brown*

Reality Check: Game of the Year Edition

While some games dominated their category, there was no clear-cut Game of the Year winner in 2000. The magazines agreed that NO ONE LIVES FOREVER, BALDUR'S GATE II, THE LONGEST JOURNEY, and COMBAT MISSION were the best of their genres. Note that *CGW* considers both real-time and turn-based games for the Strategy award, while *PC Gamer* gives separate awards for real-time and turn-based games, and *Computer Games* goes all out with an overall Strategy award, a Real-Time award, and a Wargames award. You might also make some inferences about the respective magazine staffs' taste when examining the winners of the Online/Multiplayer award.

	CGW	PC Gamer	Computer Games	AIAS Awards
Game of the Year	THE SIMS	DEUS EX	NO ONE LIVES FOREVER	DIABLO II
Adventure	THE LONGEST JOURNEY	THE LONGEST JOURNEY	THE LONGEST JOURNEY	DEUS EX
Action	NO ONE LIVES FOREVER	NO ONE LIVES FOREVER	NO ONE LIVES FOREVER	DEUS EX
RPG	BALDUR'S GATE II	BALDUR'S GATE II	BALDUR'S GATE II	DIABLO II
Strategy/Real-Time	SACRIFICE	RED ALERT 2	SHOGUN/SACRIFICE	AGE OF EMPIRES II: CONQUERORS
Wargame/Turn-Based	COMBAT MISSION	COMBAT MISSION	COMBAT MISSION	*
Simulation	COMANCHE VS. HOKUM	STEEL BEASTS	STEEL BEASTS	MECHWARRIOR 4
Driving/Racing	MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2	NFS: PORSCHE UNLEASHED	MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2	*
Sports	HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2001	NHL 2001	NHL 2001	FIFA 2001/MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2
Online/Multiplayer	EVERQUEST	RED ALERT 2	COUNTER-STRIKE	EVERQUEST: KUNARK

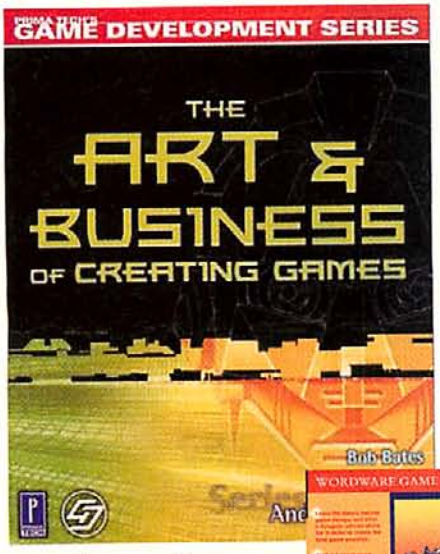
* no award given

Understanding Computer Games

New books offer fresh insight into the design and culture of gaming

Game Design: The Art & Business of Creating Games

As the longtime head of Legend Entertainment (developer of UNREAL 2), Bob Bates has been around the game design block. He'll help get you there too in this excellent book, which covers



everything from the inception of a game through marketing and PR.

Bates preaches the gospel of reducing player paranoia, and how important it is to start a game with a small portion of gameplay. His engaging thoughts on story and character development illuminate the basic building blocks of fiction—not just in game design, but in story writing in general. The author's Infocom roots show clearly here.

Not all of the book's content will be useful to designers and gamers. But the sections on marketing and PR serve as an interesting reminder of the business aspects of the industry, particularly for job seekers.

Prima Publishing, 2001, $23.99

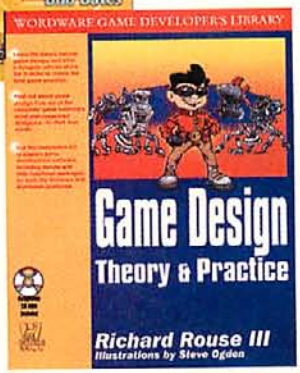
Game Design Theory and Practice

At 584 pages, *Game Design Theory and Practice* is a veritable tome. But both burgeoning game designers and devoted gamers should consider it an essential read. Not only does author Richard Rouse, a regular contributor to Gamasutra.com, cover the building blocks of game design, the book also features a treasure trove of interviews with the industry's finest designers.

Rouse's detailed lessons in game design—AI, game rules, and how to prepare a design document, to name a few—are supplemented by revealing, in-depth conversations with Sid Meier, Jordan Mechner, Chris Crawford, Will Wright, Steve Meretzky, and others.

The off-the-cuff insight these designers offer is invaluable. Ed Logg, for instance, who can claim ASTEROIDS, CENTIPEDE, GAUNTLET, and several other classics on his résumé, casually details what he calls the "basic criteria" of game design, including gem: "The game must make it clear that death is the player's fault." Jordan Mechner notes that in his classic, KARATEKA, if you put the game disc in upside down, the game will actually play upside down. Who knew?

Ultimately, nuggets and anecdotes like this are the heart and soul of computer gaming, and alone they make this book well worth its hefty $50 price tag. Adding value area some interesting gameplay theory and the accompanying CD, which contains several valuable design tools, including Nendo, a free 3D modeller, and Erasmatron, Chris Crawford's interactive story-building engine.



Wordware Publishing, 2001, $49.95

—George Jones

But Wait, There's More

Five other must-reads offer a wide range of discourse on gaming:

1. **www.gamasutra.com**
2. ***Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, Johan Huizinga**
3. ***Joystick Nation*, J.C. Herz**
4. ***Game Over: How Nintendo Zapped an American Industry*, David Sheff**
5. ***The Art of Computer Game Design*, Chris Crawford**



Video games and the Entertainment Revolution

"The story of the inner life of video games," Steven Poole asserts near the end of *Trigger Happy*, "is not just a disinterested analysis. It's a challenge, a gauntlet."

This sums up Poole's work, which is most definitely not about game design. Not solely, at least. Part history, part philosophical discourse, *Trigger Happy* is probably the most interesting read of the books here.

The book opens by disputing the commonly accepted story placing the origin of gaming at MIT. The real origin, the author claims, was at the Brookhaven National Laboratory, where William A. Higinbotham, a former member of the Manhattan Project, sought to devise an entertaining exhibit for visiting members of the public. He hacked together a crude, early version of PONG.

From here, Poole rides a series of interrelated tangents ranging from SPACE INVADERS to Shigeru Miyamoto's game design philosophy to Japanese gaming tastes to more controversial topics such as violence, citing a slew of authors, game designers, and philosophers along the way. The author makes provocative arguments as he connects the dots between video games and mainstream culture. He envisions Pac-Man as the *übercapitalist*, gobbling up everything in sight. He quotes David Cronenberg (*Existenz*) remarking that the gaming industry has "a propensity to imitate Hollywood, which could be termed the 'anti-art.' Great video game designers may have to struggle against this trend."

You may not agree with everything Poole writes. At times, you may not even understand his analysis or choice of words. But once you dive into *Trigger Happy*, you'll have a hard time putting it down.

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PIPELINE

Software development is an inexact science when you're not sure which French conglomerate is going to buy your development studio, resulting in your reassignment to a croissant-buttering simulation. Turbulent times result in shaky dates. These dates represent the best information available at press time. If you're a publisher, send your updates to: cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

Updates

ANACHRONOX: The team is in the midst of "balancing and playtesting, tweaking and adjusting." All the line dialogue has been recorded and implemented, and the team is focusing on the ever-so-lengthy "polish" phase. The end is near.

UNREAL II: We saw the tech tools being used for UNREAL II, and while they look good, what intrigued us most was Cliff Bleszinski's statement that the game will be designed in "6- to 10-minute chunks." In a genre crowded with lengthy levels, it's a bold statement to divide a game into such small segments. We'll see how successful this approach to action design is.



SHOGO 2: Monolith flashed some screenshots at the Game Developers Conference in San Jose. Unfortunately, an insider at Monolith says SHOGO 2 was merely a mock-up designed to show off LithTech 3.0, and there's not necessarily anyone working on it. Alas.

DRAGON'S LAIR 3D: With the team just about to finish up the levels and beef up the AI, it's easy to see this title getting released a few months later than originally anticipated.

STAR TREK: BORG ASSIMILATOR: Activision just announced this title. Strategy games involving Star Trek have a bit of a dubious history, but Cyberlore is behind this one. If it can apply the same magic it created in MAJESTY to this title, we may get one of those rare good Star Trek games.





HALF-LIFE: BLUE SHIFT: This used to be a Dreamcast product. Now, PC gamers can get to live a day in the life of a Barney. BLUE SHIFT will also come with HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE, a slew of new multiplayer maps, and "new High-Definition Content." Translate that as "ultra-detailed models" or something.

Age of Wonders II: The Wizard's Throne GOD	Spring 2002
Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare Infogrames	Summer 2001
Anachronox Eidos	July 2001
Arcanum Sierra	May 2001
Asheron's Call 2 Microsoft	Winter 2001
B-17 Flying Fortress Hasbro	February 2001
NEW Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal Interplay	Fall 2001
Battlecruiser Millennium 3000AD	Spring 2001
Battle Isle: Darkspace Blue Byte	Summer 2001
Battle Realms Crave Entertainment	Summer 2001
Bio Strike Red Storm	Spring 2001
NEW Black Isle Studios: Torn Interplay	Winter 2001
Command & Conquer: Renegade Westwood	Summer 2001
Commandos 2 Eidos	May 2001
Dark Sector Digital Extremes	Winter 2001
Destroyer Command GAME Studios	May 2001
Deus Ex 2 Eidos	Winter 2001
Diablo II: Lord of Destruction Blizzard	Summer 2001
UPDATE Dragon's Lair 3D Blue Byte	Summer 2001
Duke Nukem Forever 3D Realms	Fall 2001
Dungeon Siege Microsoft	September 2001
Earth & Beyond Westwood	Winter 2001
Elder Scrolls: Morrowind Bethesda	Summer 2002
Empire Earth Sierra	Fall 2001
Emperor: Battle For Dune Westwood	Summer 2001
Flash Point: Status Quo 1985 Bohemia Interactive	Summer 2001
NEW Flight Simulator 2002 Microsoft	Fall 2001
FLY! 2001 GOD	Spring 2001
Freedom Force Crave Entertainment	Winter 2001
Galactic Commander Online 3000AD	Summer 2001
UPDATE Global Operations Crave Entertainment	Fall 2001
NEW Half-Life: Blue Shift Sierra	June 2001
UPDATE Halo Bungie	Spring 2002
Independence War 2 Infogrames	May 2001

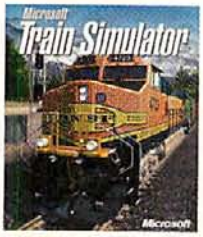
Legends of Might & Magic 3DO	Spring 2001
Magic & Mayhem 2: The Art of Magic Bethesda	Spring 2001
Majestic EA	Summer 2001
Max Payne GOD	Winter 2001
UPDATE MechCommander 2 Microsoft	July 2001
Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault EA	Fall 2001
Motor City Online Electronic Arts	Fall 2001
Myst III GAME Studios	May 2001
UPDATE Neverwinter Nights Interplay	Winter 2001
UPDATE O.R.B. Strategy First	July 2001
Planetside Verant	Fall 2001
Pool of Radiance II GAME Studios	June 2001
Red Faction THQ	August 2001
Return to Wolfenstein Activision	Fall 2001
Sid Meier's Civilization III Hasbro	August 2001
Sigma: The Adventures of Rex Chance Microsoft	Fall 2001
Silent Hunter II GAME Studios	May 2001
Simsville EA	Spring 2001
UPDATE Sovereign Sony Online Entertainment	Summer 2002
Startopia Eidos	Spring 2001
NEW Star Trek: Borg Assimilator Activision	Winter 2001
Star Trek: Bridge Commander Activision	Summer 2001
Star Wars: Battleground LucasArts	Fall 2001
Star Wars: Galaxies Verant/LucasArts	Spring 2002
UPDATE Stronghold GOD	October 2001
Team Fortress 2 Sierra	Fall 2002
Thief III Eidos	Winter 2001
UPDATE Throne of Darkness Sierra	Summer 2001
NEW Train Simulator Microsoft	Summer 2001
NEW Unreal II Infogrames	Spring 2002
WarCraft III Blizzard	Winter 2001
Warlords IV GAME Studios	Summer 2001
X-COM: Alliance Hasbro	Summer 2001
NEW Zoo Tycoon Microsoft	Fall 2001

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5

PREORDERS



Arcanum: Of Steamworks & Magick Obscura *(SIERRA STUDIOS)* Welcome to the land of Arcanum, where magic and sorcery hold equal sway with technology and science. An adventurer among dwarves, humans, orcs, and elves might just as easily wield a flintlock pistol as a flaming sword.



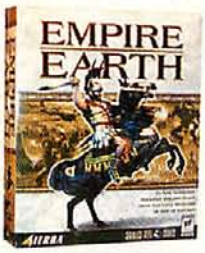
Train Simulator *(MICROSOFT)* Play as engineer or passenger. This game delivers one of the most realistic experiences to date. Contains six routes and over 600 miles of rail that was recreated using extensive data on terrain and elevation. Trackside details are nearly identical to their real-life counterpart.



Diablo 2 Expansion: Lord of Destruction *(BLIZZARD)* You will face a new series of quests and challenges to prevent Baal, the last of the Prime Evils, and his vile minions from destroying the world of Sanctuary by corrupting the Worldstone, which protects the whole mortal plane from the forces of Hell.



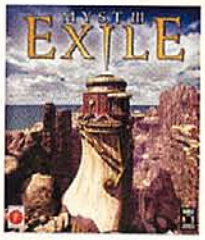
Baldur's Gate II Expansion Pack: Throne of Bhaal *(INTERPLAY)* Continue the epic saga of Baldur's Gate™ II to its ultimate conclusion as you fulfill your destiny as the child of Bhaal. Unravel the mysteries of Watcher's Keep, cast new high level spells and gain powerful new abilities.



Empire Earth *(SIERRA)* This game promises to be the premier historical real-time strategy game, as accessible as Age of Empires, but with far more excitement and depth,offering players unprecedented freedom to customize both the historical scope of their game and the character of their civilizations.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5

RELEASES



Myst III: Exile *(GAME STUDIOS)* Building on the surreal style of Myst and Riven, Myst III: Exile features new fantastic environments that made its' predecessors immersive, mysterious and beautiful. Exile features five entirely new ages for players to explore and hours of new mysteries to uncover.



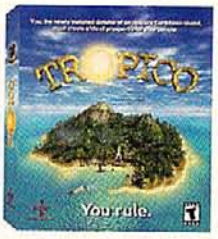
Black & White *(ELECTRONIC ARTS)* A role-playing game unlike any other you've played before. You play the role of a deity in a land where the surroundings are yours to shape and its people are yours to lord over. Your actions decide whether you create a heaven or hell for your worshippers.



Tribes 2 *(SIERRA STUDIOS)* The ultimate team-based experience, set in breathtaking worlds where brainpower and teamwork are the only true keys to survival. Unprecedented innovations in teamplay and tactical warfare will summon your intellect and gaming prowess in unimaginable ways.



Sims House Party *(MAXIS)* Toga party, anyone? This Expansion Pack makes it easier than ever for The Sims to make friends and quickly rise to the top. Party themes range from Wild West campfire cookouts to Hawaiian luaus and room-shaking raves, with plenty of objects provided to keep guests entertained.



Tropico *(G.O.D.)* As the new dictator of an obscure Caribbean island, you will need to build a path of progress for a nation mired in poverty, civil unrest, and infighting. Easy-to-learn, hard-to-master, and utterly addictive, combining political intrigue, with the best building-oriented gameplay.

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TOP 20

The best in gaming, as voted by gamers



1 **Diablo II** (Blizzard)

Not everyone loved it, but everyone bought it. After selling nearly three million copies, Blizzard is building an add-on that will increase the resolution to 800x600 while adding two new characters and a fifth act. You thought you were through with this game? Think again.

Baldur's Gate II (Interplay)

It didn't sell as well as DIABLO II, but BioWare's landmark RPG racked up many more awards. Check out our preview of the THRONE OF BHAAL expansion pack, featuring the return of Sarevok, in next month's issue.



2

Age of Empires II: Age of Kings (Microsoft)

The king of strategy is still in the U.S. top ten list of PC software titles 16 months after its release.



3

4 **Unreal Tournament** (Infogrames)
5 **Combat Mission** (Battlefront)
6 **Deus Ex** (Eidos)
7 **The Sims** (EA)
8 **Age of Empires II: The Conquerors** (Microsoft)
9 **Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** (Ubisoft)
10 **Half-Life: Opposing Force** (Sierra)
11 **Homeworld** (Sierra)
12 **Black & White** (EA)
13 **The Sims: Livin' Large** (EA)
14 **No One Lives Forever** (Fox Interactive)
15 **Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2** (EA)
16 **Quake III Arena** (Activision)
17 **Rollercoaster Tycoon** (Infogrames)
18 **Icewind Dale** (Interplay)
19 **Thief 2** (Looking Glass)
20 **MechWarrior 4** (Microsoft)

The *CGW* Top 20 is an online poll conducted in partnership with Gamespot. Anyone can vote, even Canadians: Point your browser to www.computergaming.com and pick 10 favorites. We print the 20 highest-scoring games.

The Top 20 is limited to games less than two years old. After two years, games become eligible for the *CGW* Hall of Fame (see page 80).

Handy STATS

By Alex "Poopix" Handy

35
Number of minutes it took Stephen Knox to defeat ADVENTURE on the Atari 2600.

1
Number of weeks it took Charles Ardai to defeat BLACK & WHITE.

4.4
Years DUKE NUKEM FOREVER has been in development.

3.7
Years MAX PAYNE has been in development.

4.3
Years DAIKATANA was in development.

$20
The going rate for an intact Odyssey home gaming system on eBay.

$10
Going rate for a TRS-80 home computer on eBay.

$512
How much I wasted on Transformers in my first week on eBay.

$2,995
Price of a new Pentium 120MHz PC with all the trimmings (8MB RAM, 4X CD drive, 850MB hard drive, and a 5.25-inch floppy drive) in September 1995.

$2,999
Price of a new Pentium IV 1.5GHz PC with all the trimmings in March 2001.

8,324
Number of Chinese citizens who participated in the world's largest game of musical chairs.

3
Number of emails to *CGW* describing, in detail, just how lame Handy Stats is.

Beyond These Glaciers, Your Empire Awaits.

Draconis IV

Gameworld #3
in a series of 4 ads

T TEEN
Blood
Violence
ESRB

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EA GAMES



Actual In-Game Screenshot of Draconis IV

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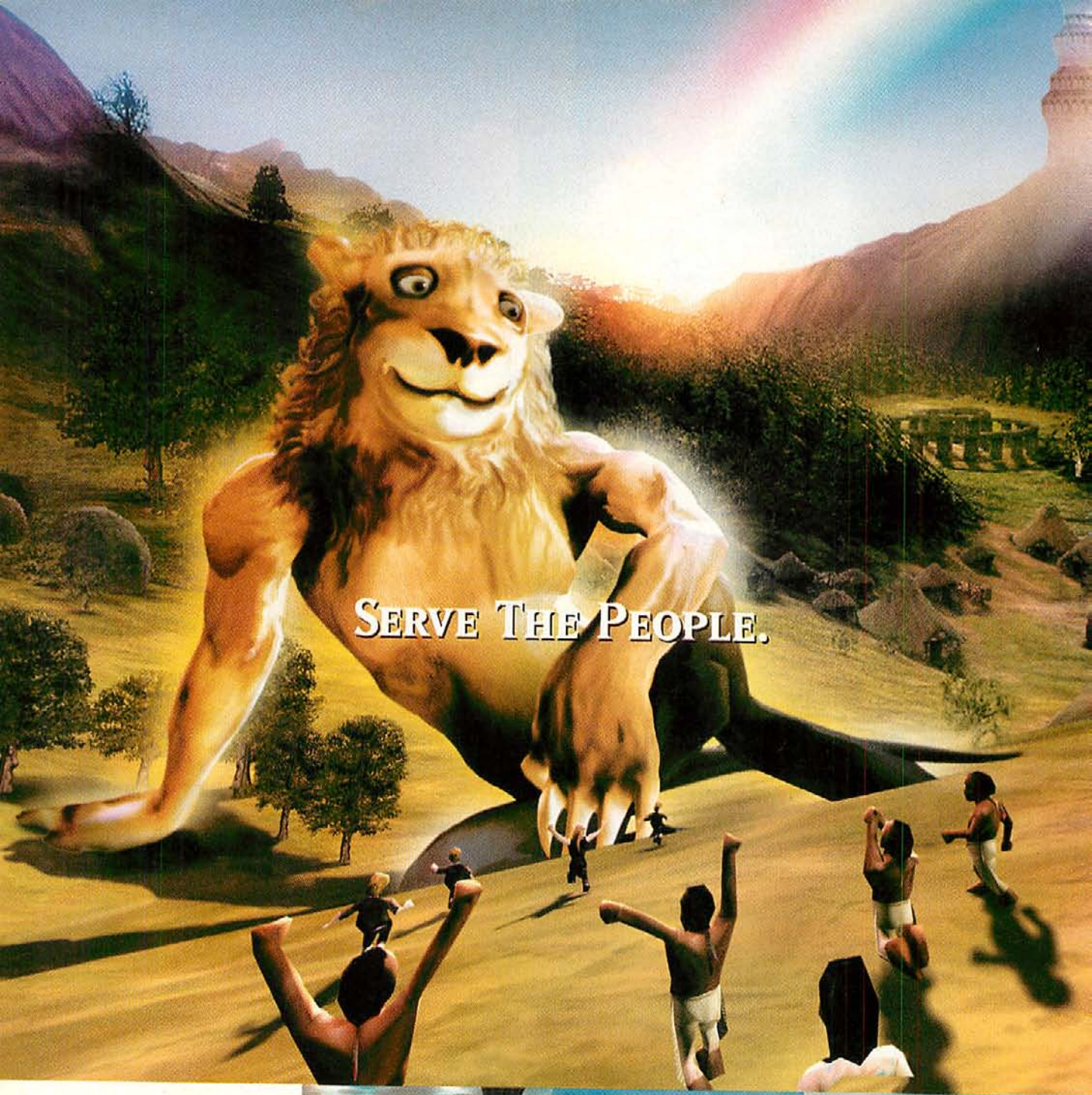


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EA GAMES

LIONHEAD STUDIOS

www.white.ea.com

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T — Comic Mischief, Violence

PC CD ROM

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www.black.ea.com

PC CD ROM

TEEN T Comic Mischief Violence ESRB

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LIONHEAD STUDIOS

EA GAMES

A New York exhibit traces the origin of computer games

THE CLASSICS LIVE!

You are at the end of a road, outside a small building...

West of building. You are standing in front of the American Museum of the Moving Image in Queens, New York. Inside, a new exhibit named Expanded Entertainment chronicles the four-decade history of computer games. A revolving door is in front of you.

>enter revolving door.

As you pass through the revolving door into the museum, you feel a warm swoosh of air.

>east

You face a silver elevator door. To your left are restrooms. To your right lies the Expanded Entertainment exhibit.

>turn right. enter exhibit.

In front of you sit several ancient computer games that appear to be in working condition: a futuristic plastic green COMPUTER SPACE machine, an original PONG coin-op, and several other computer games and systems from the early years of the digital entertainment revolution. ZORK, ELIZA (the AI psychologist), an ODYSSEY system, DONKEY KONG, and PAC-MAN are all here, as well as several other classics. The museum exhibit even contains a PC running THE SIMS and a Dreamcast running CRAZY TAXI.

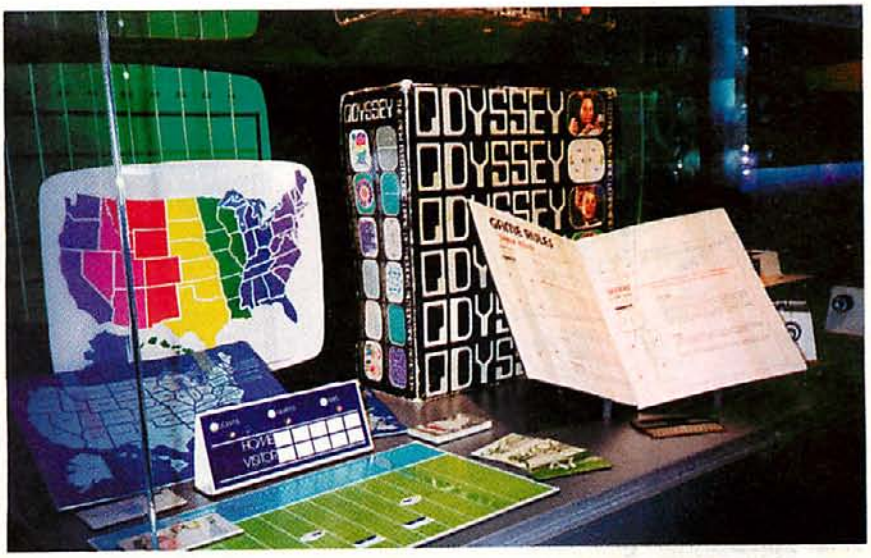
At the edge of the exhibit stands Carl Goodman, the curator of the American Museum of the Moving Image.

>talk

"We created Expanded Entertainment because video games are an important moving image-based medium and the first







one native to the computer," Goodman explains when asked about the exhibit. "Video games represent the first time that the audience actually could affect what happened on their television screen. Our approach to film and television—looking behind the scenes—lends itself quite well to the field of digital entertainment."

>talk

You ask Goodman about the origin of the classic coin-ops. He answers, "We mounted our first exhibit on games in 1989. SPACEWAR and PONG (two of them!) were acquired at that time from other collectors."

>talk

"Expanded Entertainment will not be permanent, but it isn't temporary either. We'll be expanding it to make room for online games and other forms of digital play. Our education department is also initiating a workshop for high school students on video game design, with the help of several game designers we've interviewed."

>talk

You ask Goodman about the effects of video games on art and design. "You have a generation of creative professionals who are familiar with the stylistic and visual characteristics of games. This seeps into other forms of visual culture. On TV, you have the MORTAL KOMBAT-style set design of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* and its offshoots and the hyper-real CG-enhanced sports broadcasts. Plus, films such as *The Game* and *The Cube* exhibit structural aspects of some computer game genres. And in some extremes, fine artists are attempting to create work that borrows from or critiques elements of game culture."

>goodbye

"Let's just say that video games will one day be seen as significant and impactful as previous audiovisual media." With that, Carl Goodman smiles and thanks you for coming.

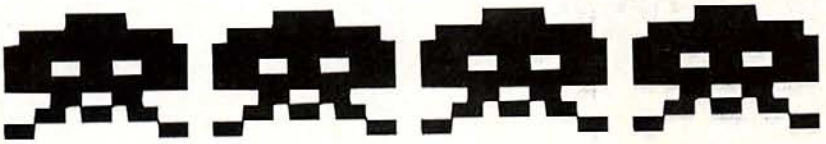
>play donkey kong

You spend the rest of the day at the Museum, pondering the impact of video games on mainstream culture and playing as many of the 15-plus games as you can. And when you get home, you check out the online exhibit, which features several other classic games, at **www.ammi.org/exhibitions/cs98/.**

—George Jones



American Museum of the Moving Image
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Developed By: BioWare Corp

Black Isle Studios™

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons

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Heroes of Might & Magic IV

GENRE: Strategy • RELEASE: Fall 2001
PUBLISHER: 3DO
DEVELOPER: New World Computing
CONTACT: www.3do.com

Sometimes less is so much more

by Robert Coffey

Some nice graphical upgrades, a bunch of new units, maybe a higher resolution—these are the de facto ingredients of almost every sequel. After all, why mess with a formula that has obviously succeeded enough to justify a sequel? Re-examining the essence of your game and redesigning it—that would be ludicrous, wouldn't it? What then to make of New World Computing and its bold restructuring of the beloved HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC franchise? Are the designers lunatics, or some kind of mad savants?

Well, know this: While the deep-down guts of the game will be familiar to fans of the series, New World is radically altering the game mechanics in order to provide more strategic depth, and to breathe new life into a franchise whose third iteration was just about marketed to death.



COLD WAR The new isometric combat screens will not only show off terrain that matches the world map, but also provide a new perspective that plays up the increased level of unit detail and scale.

A New Kind of Might, A New Kind of Magic

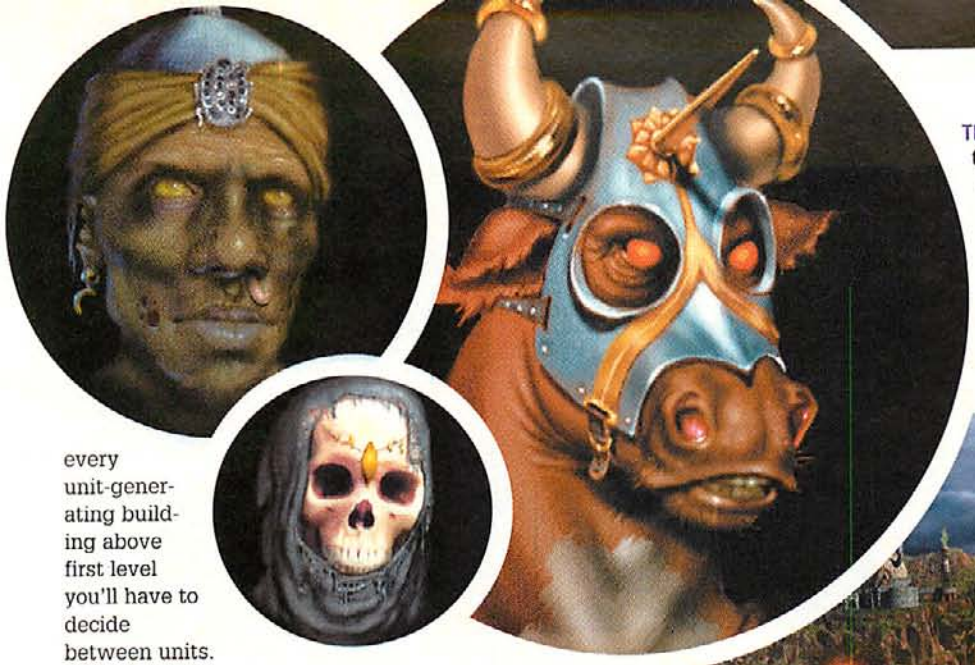
This time around, the design team has done the unthinkable, pretty much scrapping the HOMM hero and magic system in favor of a new structure that gives players more control, more choices, and more options than before. This is partially accomplished by the counterintuitive method of actually reducing the number of towns and associated magic types. When's the last time you saw a sequel trim features?

HOMM IV will feature just six town types and five schools of magic, with each school of magic associated with a specific town type. For example, the Necropolis is linked to (obviously) Death magic, while the Asylum town is identified with Chaos magic. The sixth town, the Stronghold, has no magic associated with it at all; instead, this town is the Might town, able to create some of the toughest units in the game and possessed of a Breeding Pit in lieu of a Mage Guild so it can increase unit production. The Stronghold is also capable of hiring any hero—a significant advantage, since players will only be able to hire heroes associated with their town type. The Necropolis cannot employ a Life magic–centric hero, nor can a lawful Academy town engage a Chaos-oriented hero to fight on its behalf.

But don't be fooled into thinking that heroes are going to be drastically limited in the game. On the contrary, the game will have hundreds of heroes to choose from and they'll be more unique than ever before. While all heroes will start with fairly limited, town-determined abilities, they will develop in a manner reminiscent of the game's role-playing roots. As heroes gain experience they'll be able to improve upon nine primary skills, each with three associated secondary skills that have five levels of mastery. Since it will be virtually impossible to develop any single hero to the fifth level in all of the skills (especially when you consider that the new magic schools are part of the skill set and no longer a matter of simply finding mage towers) players will have to shape every hero into a unique individual best suited to their style of play.

Choose or Lose

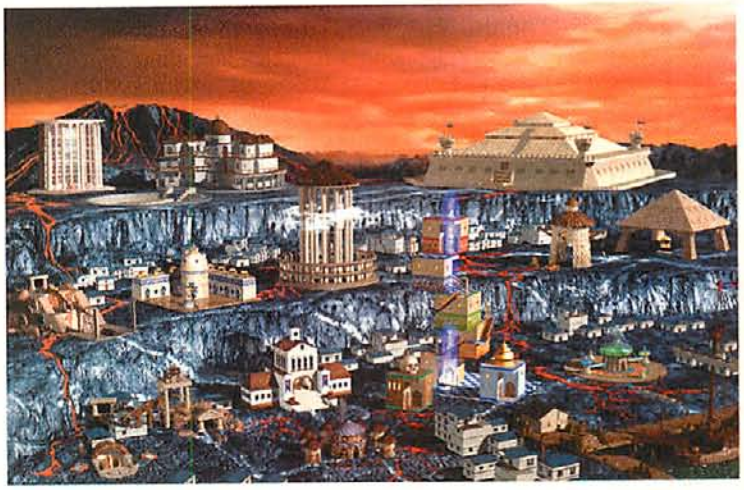
You'd expect the almost dizzying amount of character choices and radical restructuring of the town and magic system to be the end of New World's rethinking of its classic game. You'd be wrong. For one thing, there will be more tactical options in town construction: With one slot in the town screen but more than one choice for



THE QUICK AND THE DEAD The new magic and town system opens up the HEROES franchise to new hero types including minotaurs, liches, and zombies.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES As dramatically different as the Chaos-themed Asylum appears from the tidy Order of the Academy, they share some things in common—all the buildings are laid out in identical locations.





every unit-generating building above first level you'll have to decide between units. With no one town able to give a player every available unit, the design team is hoping to make town development more integral to the mid to late portions of the game. Helping that along will be new structures including the Blacksmith. This time the Blacksmith isn't a prerequisite but an actually useful building, capable of creating magic potions and items you can purchase for your armies.

Combat will be changing as well. Yes, it reflects the game's overall isometric look. Yes, it now lets all units immediately retaliate instead of counterstriking with diminished forces. And yes, it now sports two combat lines in order to better protect ranged units. But the big difference is this: Heroes can attack. Not only that, but more than one hero can be in any army, so you could team up complementary heroes to help create a truly killer army. And for the first time armies will be able to exist without heroes, though they won't enjoy the combat bonuses heroes provide (nor will they be able to use the artifacts they pick up).

Are there more changes? You betcha, but these are easily the most exciting. The astonishing thing is that as much as New World seems to be reworking its strategy franchise, it is managing to stay absolutely true to the spirit of the title. It's an approach other designers might be able to learn from. CGW



Town Balance

Here's how HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC IV's towns stack up against one another:

Academy: Order magic forces this town to employ lawful creatures. In battle, Academy forces can charm enemies into defecting to fight on their side.

Necropolis: After a successful battle, this town's Death magic automatically casts Necromancy to raise forces from the dead to augment the town's unholy army.

Asylum: While its Chaos magic won't give this town any post-combat bonus, the increased intelligence of its heroes translates to a significantly increased spell point reserve.

Haven: The one town most similar to HOMM III (it's almost all-human unit mix apes the Castle from the earlier game), its Life magic lets it resurrect lost units after winning a battle.

Preserve: The woodland creatures of this Nature magic–based town enjoy a recruitment bonus that lets them add new forces to their army after a successful battle.

Stronghold: The stronghold compensates for its lack of mage guilds with powerful creatures, higher production, more blacksmith special items, and heroes that start with three skills instead of the typical two.



3D BAT KILLING Black Isle's new RPG is still isometric, but everything is rendered in fabulous 3D, courtesy of Monolith's LithTech.

Black Isle Studios: TORN

The creators of PLANESCAPE: TORMENT create a whole new universe

by Jeff Green

When Interplay's Black Isle Studios started up years ago, the group had a huge task on its hands: Make *Dungeons and Dragons* PC games cool again. Now, years later, with one classic *D&D* game after another under its belt—including BALDUR'S GATE, PLANESCAPE: TORMENT, and ICEWIND DALE—Black Isle has given itself an even harder task: Make a cool fantasy RPG not set in the *D&D* world.

One might argue, if one were feeling argumentative, that the last thing anyone needs is yet another fantasy world full of elves, dwarves, and ogres. But Black Isle Studios: TORN is a game that even the most jaded of orc-slayers should be excited about. Combining the psychological complexity and metaphysical musings of TORMENT with the deep role-playing of FALLOUT and the monster bashing of ICEWIND DALE, TORN is shaping up to be an ambitious summation of everything Black Isle has done to date. Oh yeah, and it looks like it'll be a lot of fun to play.

GENRE: RPG • RELEASE: Fall 2001
PUBLISHER: Interplay
DEVELOPER: Black Isle Studios
CONTACT: www.interplay.com

Torn Asunder

TORN's original name, before someone on the Interplay payroll chickened out, was THE SUNDERING, but either name aptly describes the state of the universe Black Isle has created. There's no possible way to do justice to the gigantic backstory created by lead designer Dave Maldanado (who, along with most of the team, also worked on TORMENT), but in a nutshell, this is a world that has been torn into three distinct parts. The corporeal world, where the mortal races carry on generation by generation, hangs in the balance between two eternally clashing groups of deities, representing Order and Chaos—who, though banished long ago, each attempt to sway the world in their direction.



MEET DISEDIRA Also known as She-Who-Desires, this charming creature renders mad those who look upon her. Maybe it has something to do with those spiders she's wearing.

This cosmic hooey doesn't really matter, and isn't even known, to your character at first. You have problems of your own. You are cursed, doomed to wander the world bringing bad luck and ruin to anyone or anyplace you stick with too long. When the game opens, you're traveling by sea to the land of Orislane, but your boat is attacked and when you awake, you're locked in a prison hold. You negotiate your release by agreeing to help the king of Orislane, who is facing an attack from the North by a mysterious, monstrous army. Drawn into Orislane's affairs, you become something of a hero—and it turns out you may also be a long-prophesied savior of a much higher magnitude.

It's classic RPG existentialism. Who are you? What is your role in the world? But considering that this is the team that messed with our heads in TORMENT, the answers are likely to be far more complicated than they first appear.

Isn't That SPECIAL?

TORN's RPG system is a modified version of the SPECIAL system created for FALLOUT. You'll have six races to choose from for your character—human, elf, dwarf, halfling, ogre, and sidhe (forest dweller)—and, as in FALLOUT, the system is skill based and not class based, with a huge variety of skills, traits (both positive and negative), and perks available to customize your



LOTS OF CHARACTER An early version of TORN's character screen. FALLOUT fans will see a lot that looks familiar here.

character. Also as in FALLOUT, how you act throughout will have a huge impact on how non-player characters react to you and how the game ultimately plays out. Kill everything in sight, use your intelligence and charm to talk your way out of trouble, or use stealth to avoid everyone—the choice is yours.

There are 20 skills in all, divided into four general categories—Combat, Magic, Rogue, and Other (for general skills like bartering, healing, and diplomacy). As you level up, you'll get skill points that you can allocate in any direction you like. More skilled fighter-types will get special attacks and bonuses, while those specializing in magic will be able to create more complex, powerful spells. But again as in FALLOUT, you will not be committed to a specific path—any character can use magic, for example—and there is no restriction by race.

New perks will be awarded about once every three levels, and may also be handed out as quest rewards. These will give your character a specific bump in a skill or statistic. Mana Font, for instance, will enable players to cast spells more quickly, while Blind Fighting will reduce a fighter's melee penalties if he's been magically blinded during combat.

While you'll create only one character from scratch, you will get the opportunity to enlist up to five "companions" to aid in your quest, including both NPCs and summoned creatures like golems and elementals. Depending on your main character's behavior, certain NPCs may or may not help you. Once they're in your party, you'll have only limited command over them.

Things get a little more interesting in multiplayer games, in which those five slots can be filled by other players. Unlike, well, any other RPG we can think of, dialogue with NPCs will occur in real-time—not in a paused game state—so any player can jump in at any time. If one of your party has higher charisma, he or she may get better results. (All dialogue will occur onscreen, by the way, not in a separate window.)



MY PAL BONESY You'll create only one character but you'll meet a variety of companions, with different strengths and abilities, who can provide extra brains and brawn.

TORN's combat is a real-time variation on FALLOUT's SPECIAL system. Action points will still determine how much you can do, but instead of spending the points and then waiting to regain them from turn to turn, you'll wait it out in realtime—as determined by your character's speed, agility, and so on. Reflex-challenged old-schoolers need not panic here: You'll still be able to pause combat in a variety of ways as in all the other Black Isle games. And the design team is promising that, unlike *D&D*, combat will be more "hit based" than "miss based"—meaning you'll kill more things more often, without all those tedious swings at empty air.

Do I Look Purty?

Along with the shift away from *D&D*, Black Isle is making a big visual change with TORN: It's going 3D, using Monolith's LithTech engine (now called the LithTech Development System 3.0). The perspective will still be isometric, but now everything will be rendered in full 3D, with the ability to zoom in and out on the action. The result, which the screenshots here can't quite do justice to, is a sizeable leap in terms of eye candy over anything Black Isle has done to date.

Everything about TORN, in fact, gives us plenty to hope for. The richness of FALLOUT's role-playing system combined with the mature, intense storytelling of TORMENT—all wrapped in a state-of-the-art 3D package? Forget the lack of that familiar *D&D* license. TORN is right up there with ARCANUM in the upper tier of exciting RPG releases to come this year. CGW





TORN's 3D engine will allow you to view the action from different perspectives and distances.

Sigma: The Adventures of Rex Chance

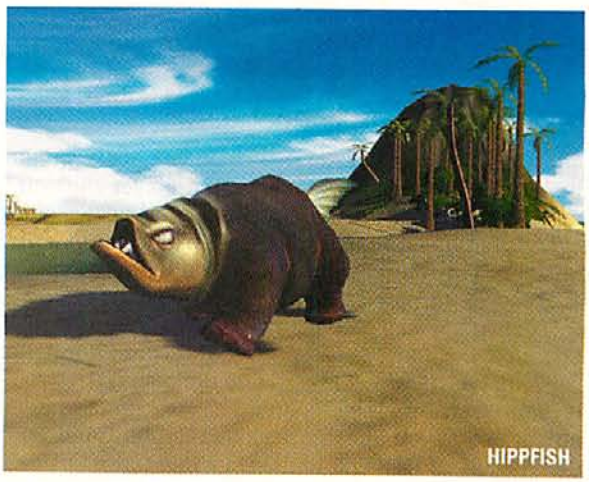
Relic recreates strategy gaming with a recombinant animal-mixer and armies of mutant beasts

by William O'Neal

By now you've all heard about SIGMA: THE ADVENTURES OF REX CHANCE. The brainchild of Relic CEO and industry wunderkind Alex Garden, SIGMA is poised to do what all desire but few achieve: follow greatness with greatness. We recently sat down with Garden to find out what this game has in store for us.

GENRE: Strategy • RELEASE: Q4 01
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Relic Entertainment
CONTACT: www.relic.com

In a really big nutshell, SIGMA is a real-time strategy game set in a fantastic 1930s world. The game's story follows the adventures of Rex Chance, a famous WWI adventurer and explorer, who has been dispatched to the South Pacific to save Dr. Lucy Willing—the proverbial damsel in distress—or so you think. Garden assures us that "As the story unfolds, you'll discover a devious and twisted plot...that I can't tell you anything about right now." All we know is that the story has something to do with the supposedly "kidnapped" Willing and a mad scientist by the name of Upton Julius.



HIPPFISH

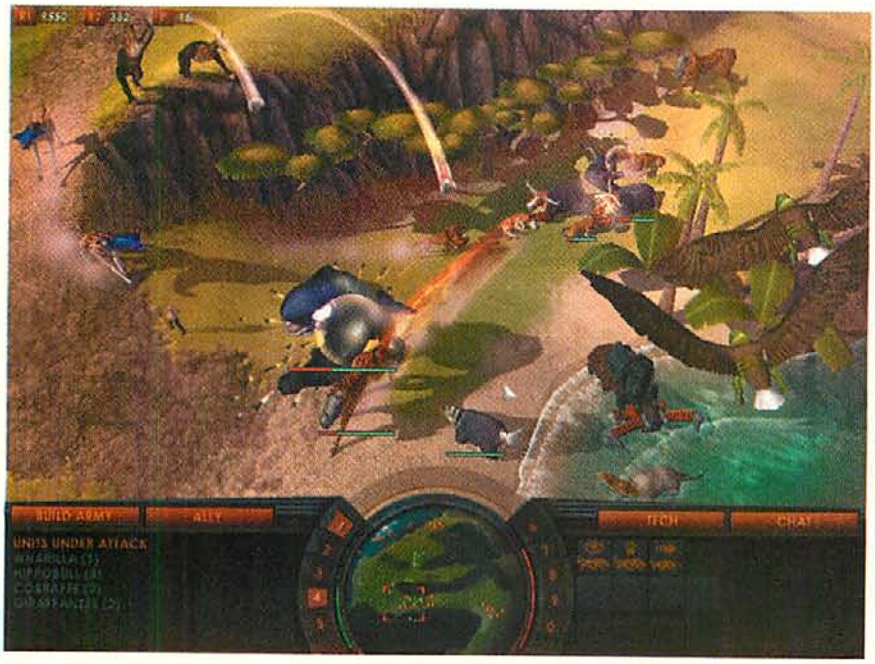
Bubblegum Biology

SIGMA is a real-time strategy game in the classic sense, but rather than battling with robots or futuristic soldiers, here your units are made up of biologically spliced animal mutants. Using what Garden calls "bubblegum biology," players can create a seemingly infinite number of creature permutations from the various animal species. And to that end, SIGMA will contain some 40 animals for you to "play" with, Dr. Moreau-style.

The game takes place on an archipelago with a strangely varied ecosystem: Some islands are tropical while neighboring ones might be arctic. These environmental conditions will impact the gameplay. In other words, when preparing for battle, you'll have to think about the environment as well as your enemy while "creating" your units. If the battle is to take place in a hot environment, you'll need creatures that are resistant to dry conditions, such as a camel. If you want an animal with a ranged attack, you can morph the camel with a spitting cobra. This way, you'll have an animal with great stamina that can attack from a distance. If you need a scout, you can combine a bat with a wolf. This creature will be able to fly but it will also exhibit the wolf's pack mentality, which could come in handy during a battle.

And this is exactly how SIGMA's "bubblegum biology" will work. As you mix and match from the game's 50 basic animals—including fliers, swimmers, insects, and mammals—your creations will behave exactly how you'd expect.

But animals aren't the only creatures that you'll be dealing with. In order to acquire the animals for your sick and



ANIMAL MAGNETISM As the game progresses, you'll create more unique units. Expect battles like this.



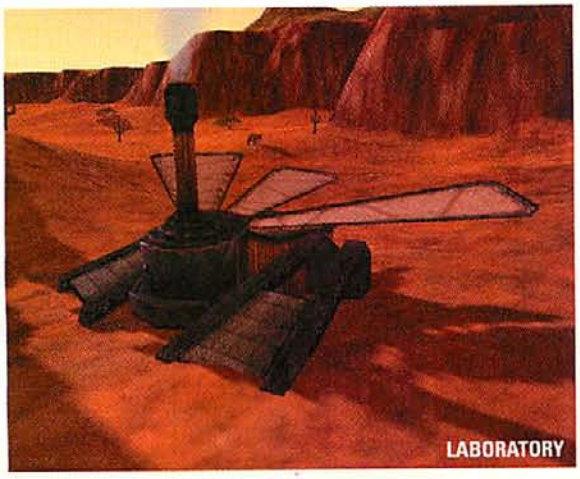
SIGMA isn't only about creating effective animal combinations. You'll also be required to maintain vehicles, like this locomotive.

twisted "experiments," you'll need to enlist the aid of the islands' inhabitants. Henchmen will chase and capture animals for your lab, while villagers will give you hints about possible animal combinations to create.

Henchmen are also instrumental in obtaining resources. There are two key resources in the game: scrap and electricity. The more scrap you gather, the more towers you can erect to draw electricity. By accumulating more resources, you can build larger armies. The final crucial ingredient is time: More advanced creatures take longer to research. So players who opt for a quick rush must expend valuable resources early on, while those who hang back can develop larger, fiercer, creatures in greater quantities—if they can fend off the early attacks.



WATER CHAMBER



LABORATORY

A TALE OF TWO BEASTIES
Uh...yeah. With animals like this running around, we dare you to order the steak and lobster.



GORLOBSTER



SPITTING CAMEL

Have Envelope, Will Push

It's clear with SIGMA that Relic is once again attempting to create something that is more than just another real-time strategy game. "With HOMEWORLD, we tried to build a product that was evolutionary on many levels and revolutionary on one level. And SIGMA is the same way," Garden says. "There are many evolutionary improvements and there's one revolutionary change. We've taken the real-time strategy (RTS) genre and asked ourselves, 'How can it be improved?'" To that end, Relic has streamlined the RTS process so that the game moves at a faster pace, and they've also eliminated a lot of the redundant micro-management, building, and research processes. "We want players to focus on doing the things that are fun: fighting your enemies and building these incredible armies."

While the game still has the elements of a classic real-time strategy game—resource management, collection, and building—Relic has tried to make all of those things as quick and easy as possible, and generally, make the game easier to get into and more accessible. Adds Garden, "Most people spent the first 15 minutes of HOMEWORLD learning how to play it. We want people to spend the first 15 minutes of SIGMA giggling like little girls because they can't believe how much fun they're having."

What About the Community?

SIGMA wouldn't be a Relic game if it didn't boast a robust multiplayer component. The game will sport multiplayer modes that pit cooperative players against the CPU, or up to 16 players can go at it deathmatch-style online. Relic also promises to provide tools that will enable the gaming community to extend the product.

"Relic's goal is to build products that fundamentally improve the quality of the industry," Garden proclaims. "We want to make games that push gaming into new directions. We want to challenge our peers to build games that blow minds and push genres." CGW

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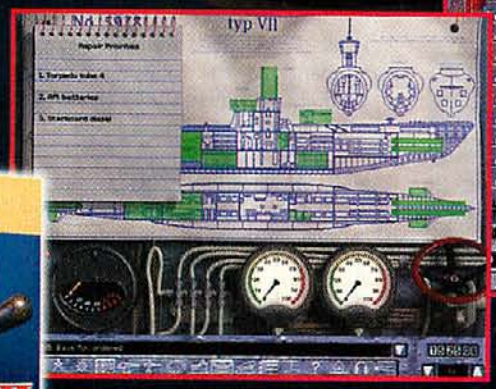
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Arcanum: Of Steamworks And Magick Obscura

Choose your own steam-driven adventure

by Thierry Nguyen

You know what's wrong with role-playing games (RPGs) these days? There's no longer any character in the character generation. What usually happens is that you're feverishly rolling some numbers, over and over, until you get some values that rank you higher than a mere knave. Then you slap on the toughest-looking (or "cutest," if you're one of those guys who play as female characters) exterior, buy some rusty equipment, and start the game. Big whoop.

GENRE: RPG • RELEASE DATE: Summer 2001
PUBLISHER: Sierra • DEVELOPER: Troika
CONTACT: www.sierrastudios.com/games/arcanum

So here I am, fully engaged in "RPG grognard gaming-from-his-cave" mode, and when making a character in ARCANUM, I come across the following choices:

"Beat With An Ugly Stick"
"Idiot Savant"
"Mad Doctor"

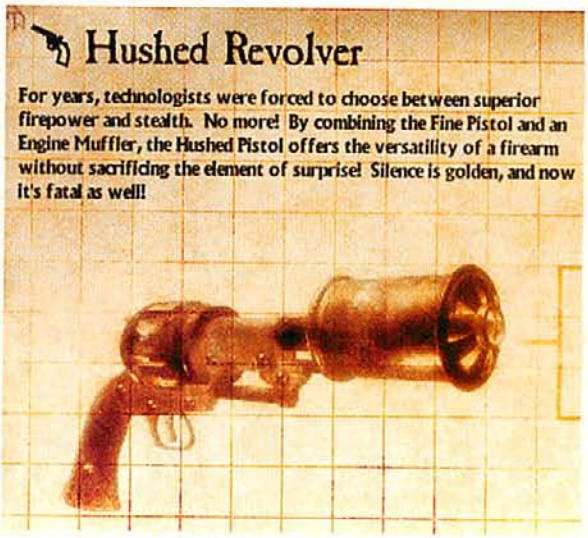
Forget all the other myriad choices, such as which of the 16 schools of magic do I follow, whether I forgo magic and embrace one of the eight technology disciplines, or whether I want to increase my Intelligence while putting some points into Pickpocketing. It all boils down to whether I want to make an elven supermodel, or a half-ogre who ran away with the circus.

Choose Wisely

ARCANUM is a game about flexibility and choices. It's the kind of RPG where I can play the dullard fighter, whose opening entry in his journal reads, "Silly dying nome guy give me a fancy ring and say I need find some boy and give it to him. He silly, he say evil stuff comin and he excaped and stuff. Then he die. He silly. and dead." Or I can have the bookworm elven sorceress engage in the cut-and-thrust of debate. This is an RPG in which I can either manufacture a "looking-glass rifle" or simply cast "Unseen Force" during combat. Even in the midst of combat, I can either frantically click on enemies and buttons in real-time, or hit the space bar and ponder my moves in turns.



PARTY HEARTY Party management is like FALLOUT, in that it's mostly indirect and limited to "give me your stuff" or "follow me."



MAN WITH THE STEAMGUN As you level up, you can put points into learning more complicated technical schematics, such as this silenced pistol.



With the people who some consider to be the "heart and soul" of the FALLOUT team developing this game, FALLOUT veterans will recognize the style almost immediately. The isometric perspective, the delicate system of reputation across the landscape, and the independently-minded party members. Even when locked into turn-based combat, the familiar row of bubbles delineating action-points appears in the bottom-middle of the screen.

Another carryover from FALLOUT is the immense dia-

THOSE DARN SNAKEPEOPLE Again, it's a choice as to whether you truthfully pursue the path of evil, or lie and stay on the side of "good," as in this case.

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Steampunk Fellows

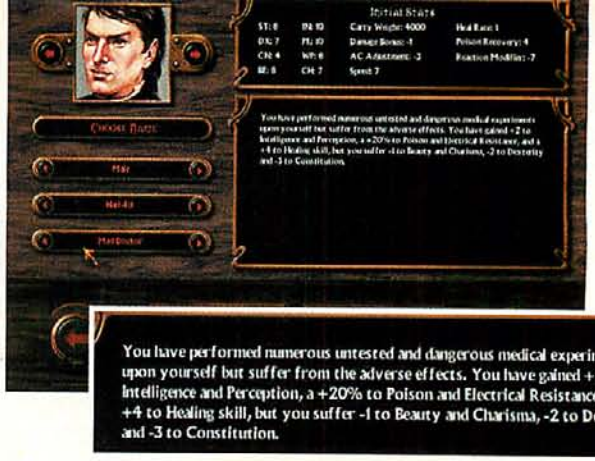
We asked the Troika founders some questions about particular details in ARCANUM. For those of you just tuning in, we have Jason Anderson, Leon Boyarsky, and Tim Cain on the receiving end.

CGW: Okay, turn-based or real-time—which is the way you personally play ARCANUM?
Jason: Real-time.
Leon: I play real-time, and quickly switch to turn-based when the going gets tough. I like switching between the two, as it enables me to plough through easy combat quickly and rely more on strategy when facing tough opponents.
Tim: Surprisingly, I play real-time most of the time. I am glad we have turn-based though, for the few really tough fights. Then I become more strategic and plan my attacks better.

CGW: What ended up being your favorite character/classes/races for ARCANUM? Magic, or technology?
Jason: In ARCANUM, as it was in FALLOUT, my favorite type of character is a female gunfighter. Of course, I usually choose an elf, which makes it more of a challenge given her natural conflict with tech, but it's just such a cool character to play.
Leon: I prefer playing either a dwarven technologist or a half-ogre combat machine. Or maybe a suave elf diplomat magick user...aaak. It's tough for me to choose one, as I know all the cool and different things available (or not) to each character. When I look at all the different variations we put in this game, sometimes I think we're insane (well, I'm certain Chad is).
Tim: I ended up liking magic-using thieves a lot, but I will always have a soft spot for big dumb half-ogres ("Voigil sez I'm uh impotent guy!").

CGW: How many hours went into the production of ARCANUM (so far)?
Jason: It's impossible to tell. With all the odd hours, late nights, all-nighters, etcetera, I couldn't even guess.
Leon: It is tough to say. I'd say the amount of man-hours into ARCANUM has to be somewhat equivalent to the man hours spent building the pyramids. Give or take a few.
Tim: A back of the envelope calculation revealed 100,000 man-hours. Oh my god.

CGW: And is it everything you thought it would be? Going back to your original design document—is it the same game? Or has it changed in any fundamental ways? How have you had to compromise?
Jason: In many ways it is actually more than I thought it would be. Of course, there are things that were in my original concept that were never fully realized, but there are twice as many things that I didn't expect that are really cool. I believe that games generally take on lives of their own as they go through the development cycle.
Leon: The hardest thing about making a game (especially one of this size and complexity) is that things don't always work like you thought they would. There have been instances where we implemented features exactly as we had designed them, and they just don't feel right or aren't fun. Holding on too tightly to preconceived ideas can stifle a game, if you're not careful. I think ARCANUM captures quite a bit of the spirit we'd envisioned. On our, uh, "previous" game, I'd say it was about 50% of what was originally visualized. ARCANUM will probably be more like 75 – 80 %.
Tim: We changed some spells and skills and how you spend character points and such, but most of the game is the same as the original design doc. I was just telling someone that only one original feature didn't make it into the game—roads on the worldmap. I still don't know how I would have implemented them anyway.



MAD, MAD, I TELL YOU This was a moment where I genuinely felt like I was making a comic-book character, as I had to decide on my "secret origin."

log trees that encourage multiple approaches to solving problems. Even in the beginning, when you run into a man on the road, you can keep on moving, talk with him, accuse him of being an assassin and kill him, or let your party-member attempt to sweet-talk past him. Soon after, you can either be trusting—and simply give your ring to that nice-looking halfling fellow—or you can lie and attempt to investigate the situation on your own.

The reputation system is more robust than in FALLOUT's, as it tracks not only alignment but also faction and race. A half-orc dabbling in chemistry would be hard-pressed to gather any useful information in the anti-technology elven city. Consequently, an elven night mage accepting the mission from the "evil cult" will have a different experience than the half-elf day mage who still refuses to help the "evil cult." You get the idea.

In tinkering around with this late beta of ARCANUM, it's a bit difficult to express the "what's the big deal?" component. With many RPGs locked into defined systems of game mechanics and play-balancing, the team at Troika managed to extend the vision they had way back in FALLOUT: an RPG with hard choices as to how you'll proceed, and the game reacting accordingly. Add onto that basic tenet the imaginative setting (dragons fighting zeppelins, and orcs flying aeromachines!), the entire magic-vs.-technology rivalry, and the character creation, and you can imagine why I'm waiting for the day when I can play this game in its full non-crashing final-release glory. CGW



WE GET SIGNAL My idiot elf asks "Whut you say?" as opposed to something with polysyllabic words.

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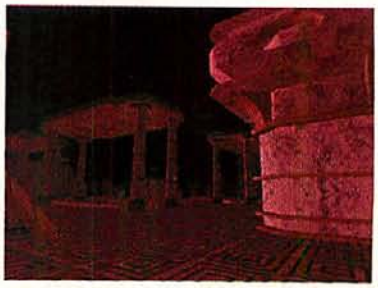
Developed by RATBAG

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EverQuest: The Shadows of Luclin

They've conquered the world; now Verant is taking us to the moon

by Jeff Green



GENRE: RPG • RELEASE DATE: Fall 2001
PUBLISHER: Sony Online Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Verant Interactive
CONTACT: www.everquest.com

There's good news and bad news for EVERQUEST fans. The good news: There's another expansion pack on the way. The bad news: There's another expansion pack on the way. EQ addicts who were thinking of maybe moving on with their lives—or at least moving on to another game—are soon going to have some very compelling reasons to keep sticking around. And bewildered gamers who have always wondered what the big deal was in the first place are going to get their best jumping-on point since the game's original release two years ago.

Due this December, EVERQUEST: THE SHADOWS OF LUCLIN is Verant's third add-on to their phenomenally successful MMORPG—and it's the most ambitious one yet. The EQ team is cramming so much new and exciting stuff into LUCLIN that it represents—much more than the KUNARK or VELIOUS expansions did—a significant advancement in the EVERQUEST experience, both in terms of technology and gameplay. Tired of simply adding on new zones to the existing world, Verant has done something wholly unexpected; they've created an entire new planet to explore. And that's just the beginning.

A Whole New World

Those who have spent time traversing the lands of Norrath are probably familiar with those odd-looking wizard spires that appear on each continent. It turns out that they have a very unusual (and heretofore unknown) function: They are portals for travelling to and from one of Norrath's inhabitable moons, called Luclin. According to EQ producer Jeff Butler, Luclin has always been part of the EQ backstory, and there's always been a way to get there—it's just that no current users of magic knew how to do it. Come December, the portals are opening up again.

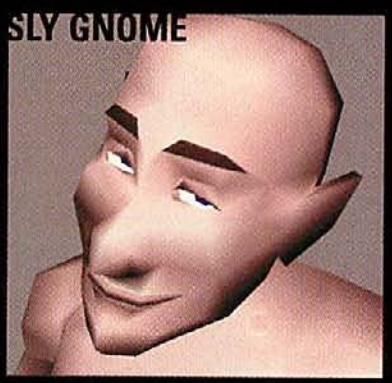
Luclin will be comprised of about 24 zones, and, unlike SCARS OF VELIOUS (which was geared towards the hardcore) they will accommodate all players, from levels 1 through 60, with everything from newbie zones to super-high-level raid-oriented zones. None of them will look like any zones you've seen before, because Luclin happens to be a moon that does not revolve. So half the moon remains in total darkness, the other half in constant daylight. In addition, you will also be able to travel through the moon's core, which will contain both cities and dungeons. Luclin will also include an area that many fans have been clamoring for for ages: a bazaar. This will be an established, formal area where players can go to buy and sell items to one another—without having to engage in auction-shouting across entire zones. Every continent on Norrath will have at least one direct route to Luclin, via the spires, and the team said they are also working on the possibility of other entry points, including the ability of certain classes, like wizards, being able to teleport in...maybe.

The new moon will also be the host to one of the game's other big new features: a brand new race to play, called the Kerran. Jokingly described by the team as a "mystical space cat," the Kerran are a large, strong

Facials

All of EQ's races are being redesigned from scratch, including a complete set of sophisticated facial expressions, which users will be able to control.









ANOTHER EXPANSION? This gnome is as surprised as we were to hear about another EQ expansion.

Eye Candy Dept.

A new planet, race, and class would probably be enough to sucker most of us in for another 1,000 hours. But the team is also doing something that, frankly, we might have expected further down the line in a full-blown EQ sequel. Verant is completely upgrading the game art, in 32-bit color, with much more detailed environments and a much higher polygon count for character models.

In fact, all of EVERQUEST'S races are being completely redesigned from scratch, with a brand-new look across-the-board. My somewhat flip reaction to the new models, that they are "a little less dorky looking," drew laughs from the team, who then promptly agreed. "That's what we should subtitle the expansion," said Butler. "Shadows of Luclin: A Little Less Dorky Looking." Along with new models, the artists have been working on incorporating a variety of sophisticated facial gestures for players to use. Now, you won't have to just type your disgust or anger with someone—you can show it on your face.

Those who buy the expansion will see all characters, whether on Luclin or in Norrath, in their next-generation look; those who don't upgrade will still see everything the old way. Because Verant realize that some people may feel too emotionally tied to their halfling or dwarf or ogre the way he or she originally looked, they are probably going to stick in a toggle that will let LUCLIN players view characters the old way. Though once you see the new models, most will want to abandon their old dorky characters like yesterday's news.



LUSH LIFE Luclin's environments are noticeably richer and deeper than those in the original game.

feline-type race. Butler said they were still working on balancing, but that in terms of abilities, Kerrans will most closely resemble barbarians. If you play as Kerran, you will start in Luclin, though you can freely travel to Norrath, where you'll be accepted by non-evil races.

Kerran will also be the perfect race to try out the brand new character class—the beastlord. Also available to certain Norrath races (possibly the barbarian, ogre, and troll—though this is not final) the beastlord is a hybrid class, mixing abilities of the warrior and shaman. Like all hybrid classes, you won't be as efficient as either a pure warrior or pure shaman, but the combination will give you some cool traits. For one thing, this is the first class that lets you be a "tank" (an offense-oriented melee fighter), while also being able to conjure a pet. And the extra-cool thing about the beastlord's pet—unique to any character class—is that it will persist across zones, meaning you can travel long distances without having to waste mana by re-conjuring all the time.

To the Moon

Maybe it's the heat they're feeling from the upcoming next-generation of MMORPGs, like ANARCHY ONLINE and SHADOWBANE. Maybe it's sheer boredom. Whatever the reason, the EQ team is making a more ambitious expansion than we could have hoped for. Milo Cooper, the team's senior artist, had the best answer.

"We play the game, too," he said. "It makes our job more fun to do these things." CGW



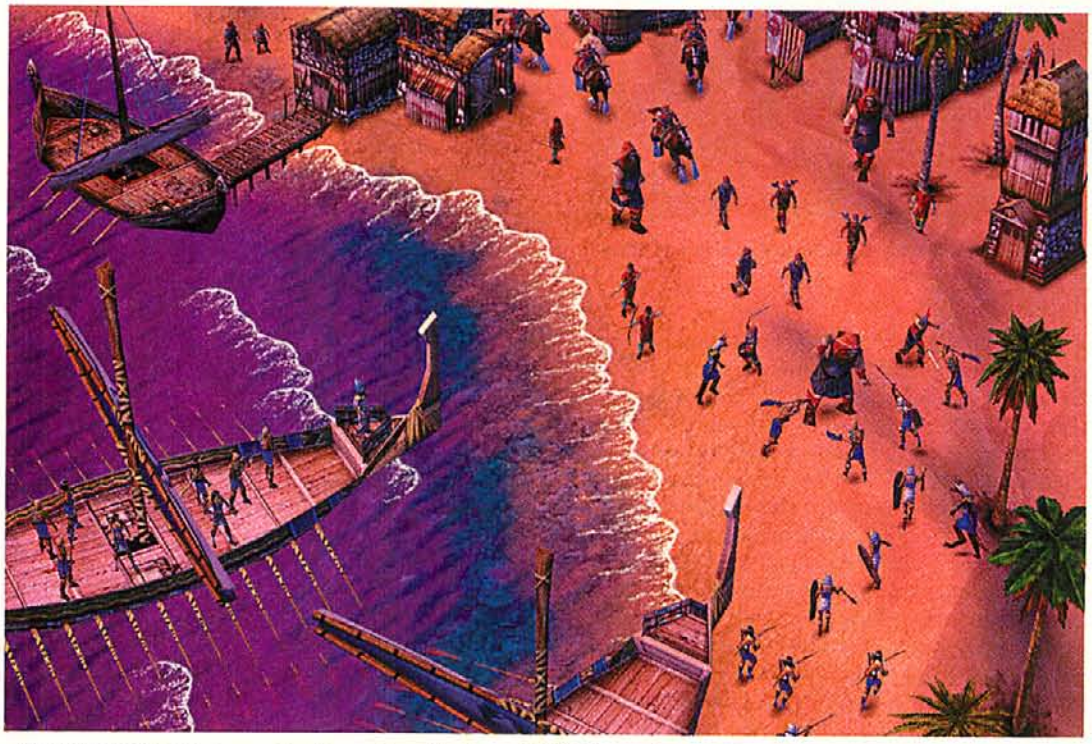
MYSTICAL SPACE CAT EVERQUEST's brand new race, the Kerran, will make their home on the moon of Luclin.

GODS AND MONSTERS

by Ken Brown

Unleash the wrath of the gods in AGE OF MYTHOLOGY, the next game from the creators of AGE OF EMPIRES

Ensemble Studios is at the top of its game. With the critical and commercial success of all four of its AGE OF EMPIRES games, Ensemble enjoys a privileged position at the apex of strategy game developers, along with Blizzard (STARCRAFT, WARCRAFT II) and Firaxis (SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION II). With their winning formula of historical units, melee combat, and beautiful graphics, Ensemble's games have accomplished the rare feat of crossing over from hardcore to casual gamers. The company wants to keep what works, but there's one big change in store for its next game. Think of it as a giant steel can, a mile high and wider than a coliseum, labeled "Mythological Whoop-ass;" Ensemble is about to crack it open.



AGE OF MYTHOLOGY's impressive 3D graphics allow beautiful lighting and water effects. As waves gently lap the shore, Norse units backed by giants gently pound Egyptians into sand.



Illustration by
Jason Babler

GODS AND MONSTERS

It's after 1 a.m., but the two dozen workers in this Dallas high-rise show utterly no interest in leaving. Half of them are huddled around 21-inch monitors in a gleaming black playtesting area, playing the successor to AGE OF EMPIRES II.

The rest are gathered just outside, following the action on a bank of monitors. A raiding party of soldiers and mythological creatures lumbers across one screen, about to enter battle. Right on the verge of combat, a huge fireball streaks from the sky and slams into the party—KA-BOOM! The screen blazes blinding white, reverberating from the force of the event. The onlookers jeer and make excited remarks, while the victim peels his hand from his eyes. All that's left is a giant smoking crater and one surviving soldier.

Another tough night at the office.

For the 65 employees of Ensemble Studios, creators of the AGE OF EMPIRES series, work and play are so closely intertwined the two are practically synonymous. Their work is making games, and Ensemble takes it so seriously that playing is a weekly requirement for everyone, including the human resources manager. The team has already put in over 600 hours of playing time on AGE OF MYTHOLOGY (working title), and the game is still a year from completion. If you bought one of the eight and a half million copies sold of AGE OF EMPIRES, RISE OF ROME, AGE OF EMPIRES II, or THE CONQUERORS and you've wondered, "How do those guys balance their games so well?" or "How do they ship bug-free games?" I can tell you: They test the living crap out of them.

Which is why they're here for the nightly playtest, gathering more information on what's working and what isn't. It's clear that far more is working than not, evidenced not only by the intensity of the players, but also by the fact that a dozen people would rather hang around at 1 a.m. and watch than get in their cars and go home. That's what you call "a good sign."

So what is this extravaganza they're working on, and how will it be different from AGE II? All will be revealed, but first we must go back in time, to a half-forgotten era long, long ago....

The Dim Mists of Time

Actually, we're only going back to 1997, so you can put away the coonskin cap and oat cakes. Just two and a half weeks after finishing the first AGE OF EMPIRES, Ensemble began working on the early versions of AGE OF MYTHOLOGY. The team had to start early, because the goals differed from those in AGE II: "From a technology standpoint, 3D was *the* goal," says tech director Dave Pottinger. "It had to look as good as what we were starting to see in AGE II, but in 3D."

While the programming team began coding the engine, the design team started a list of potential concepts. They had time to brainstorm while working on AGE II, but that didn't make the decisions any easier.

"We had a series of very painful meetings," says Ensemble cofounder Bruce Shelley, who codesigned AGE OF EMPIRES. "We'd get into these long discussions of what kind of RTS game we'd like to do. It was quite a spectrum—science fiction, WW II, superheroes, cowboys, fantasy, even going back and redoing AGE I.

"Our main goal was to create a game that would play differently. In AGE II we did really well with the reviewers, but many said there wasn't much there that was different. We were concerned that not only did our people want something different, but that our customers wanted a new experience, too."

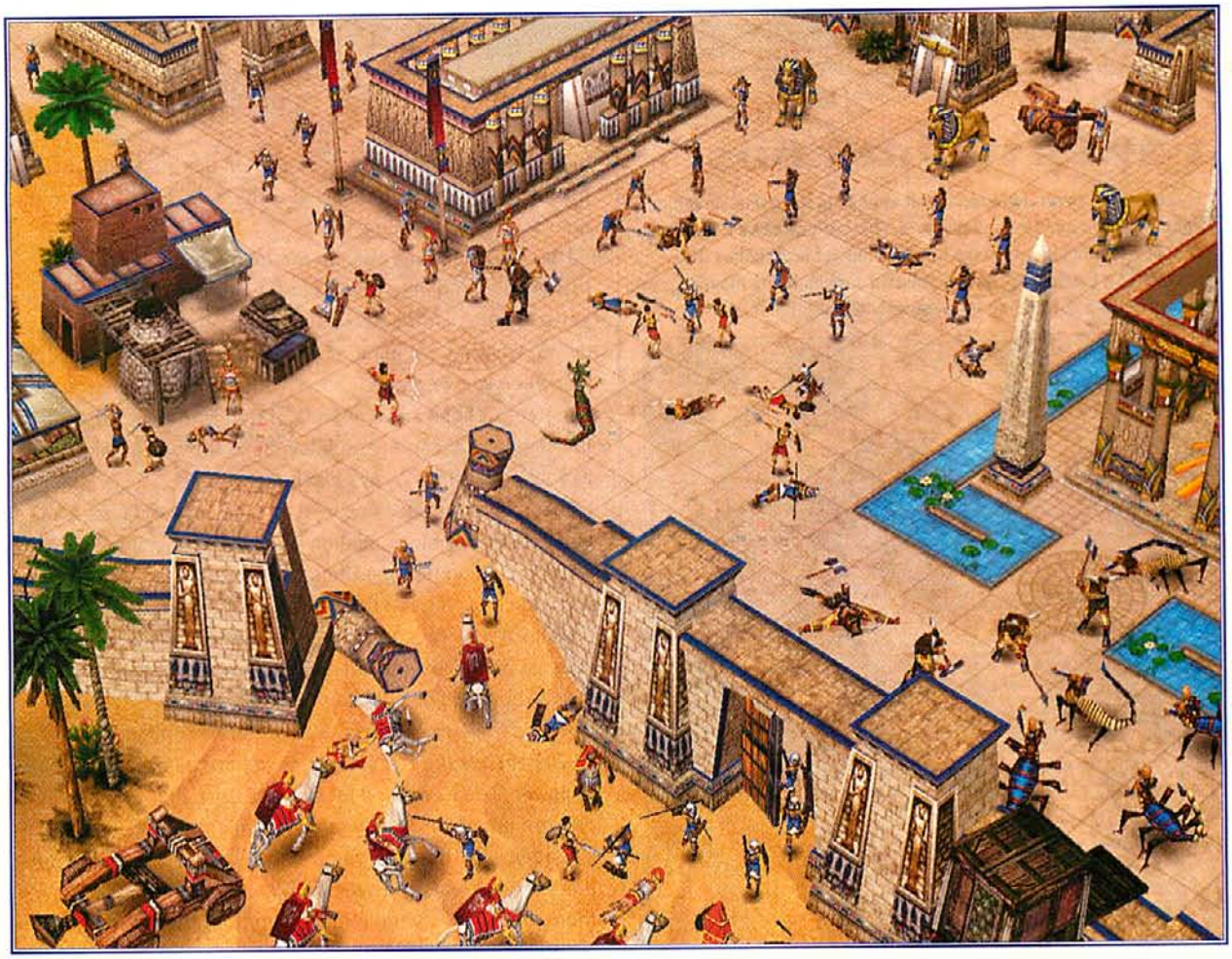
The first serious prototype was based on the lost civilization of Atlantis. Ensemble eventually dropped it, along with three other working prototypes, finally settling on the concept

As a village grows to a town and then to a city, visual flourishes fill in to make it look realistic.









A Greek player (red) has broken through the walls of an Egyptian player's city (blue). Mythological units include sphinxes (upper right), minotaurs and scorpion men (bottom right), and a medusa (middle of the screen to the left). Early versions of catapults are visible at the bottom, as is a ballista at the top. This shot reflects the fact that human units will outnumber mythological units in the game.

of mortal combat with mythological beasts and gods.

"Part of the driver for the mythology model was the new stuff that we could bring into the game that we hadn't dealt with before," says Shelley. "Especially these new kinds of creatures, all of which are unique and play differently. We knew that heroes and the god powers would introduce surprising new elements."

The topic also connected with the team on a deeper level, by extending Ensemble's traditional historical focus to the influences that shaped them. Shelley sums it up simply: "What people believe happened long ago is still a part of the human experience."

Hit or Myth

At heart, AGE OF MYTHOLOGY has the core elements of AGE OF EMPIRES. You'll gather resources, build up a town, create a fighting force, and go beat on your neighbors. This time you'll progress through three ages instead of four, and upgrade technologies in different ways, but the basic principles haven't changed. Even most of the victory conditions are the same.

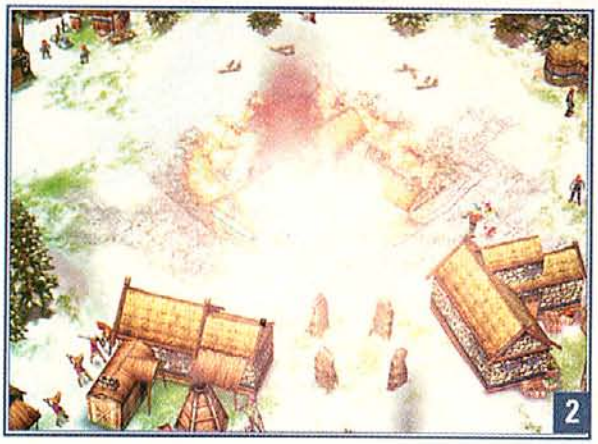
What will change is the variety of the units. In addition to regular units like archers and cavalry, there are mythological creatures like chimeras, hydras, trolls, flying griffins, and giants. There are also heroes—special human units with armor and attack bonuses. Heroes are required for communicating with the gods and directing their attacks. And then there are the gods, the king-hell "A-types" packing fire and brimstone.

In multiplayer and random map games, you'll never actually see the gods. You'll build a temple to them and try to gain their favor, but "there's no 500-foot-tall Zeus who walks around the map and kicks houses over," says lead designer Ian Fischer. "Some people thought we should have that, but it didn't seem right. It sounds silly to talk about this in terms of realism, because we're doing this mythological game with minotaurs and centaurs running around, but it

POWER OF THE GODS

There will be several powerful god attacks in the game, including lightning, earthquakes, and meteors. This series shows a flaming meteor shooting down (1); the blinding impact that shakes the screen for a moment (2); and the instant sunken living room it leaves behind (3). Anyone for a return to 2D graphics?







didn't seem right to have gods standing there yelling at people. We didn't want to have archers shooting Zeus in the kneecaps or something."

The new unit types change the game dynamic entirely. Instead of being able to predict the outcome of a battle between two historically based forces, suddenly you're wondering what a frost giant or phoenix is capable of doing. And just when you've got that sorted out, someone hits you with a meteor. "These are the kinds of things that can change the course of a game, and allow us to throw a monkey wrench into things," says Fischer.

Such powerful attacks can also easily upset game balance. Ensemble is dealing with that problem in several ways, including limiting the number of mythological creatures each player can have and limiting the number of god attacks. A new resource, favor, is needed for building mythological creatures and casting god powers. Favor accrues slowly, but each culture can gain bonus favor by pleasing the gods. (See the Bruce Shelley interview, page 73.)

Fischer says the team's goal is to have a healthy balance of power. "We're doing a lot to make sure that [the god powers] are not nukes, that you don't walk into battle and all of a sudden—BOOM—everybody on your side is dead. The god powers are great, and everybody's excited about using them, but we're trying to make sure that they are big events. You do this a half-dozen times during the course of a game; you don't use them once every few minutes. So when the player casts a god power, it's one of those crucial, pivotal points in the game. You know that he's going to try to cast it in the best place possible, and you've got to try to maneuver your units and stop him by killing his hero. He's got to defend his hero, so it's really this back and forth battle. The outcome will usually favor one side or the other. Either he's going to lose the favor that he's invested in his god power because you killed his hero, or a meteorite is going to smash all your troops."

"It's definitely made the combat more tactical," says tech director Pottinger. "Instead of building mythological units, you can save your favor to cast some god powers. But they're definitely not nukes that can turn the tide of a war. They may influence it and give you an advantage. But it's still up to you to finish the enemy off."

Start the Game Already

Although the core concepts are familiar, AGE OF MYTHOLOGY will have a different structure. You'll start out as one of three cultures without a central deity: Greek, Norse,

or Egyptian. In the first age, you have a choice of three deities; for the Norse, for example, those deities are Loki, Odin, and Thor. When you build a temple to one of them, you'll get technologies or combat bonuses. The sooner you build a temple, the sooner you get the bonuses—but your choice will be broadcast to all players, and they can pick other deities that are suited to exploit your weaknesses.

"Making a choice in that first age is going to be important," says Fischer. "If you explore the map and find a lot of water, and you're Greek, you can say, 'Poseidon has a lot of naval enhancements. I'll take him.' Or if you get a message that somebody has picked Loki, and you know that Loki has good archers, you can say, 'Well, Zeus gives me a cavalry bonus, and I know that cavalry is good against archers. So I'll pick Zeus.' We're trying to make that choice and the timing of that choice really interesting and important."

The pacing will be different, too, because there will be advantages to hanging back in each age. You have to build only one temple to advance to the next age, but building more temples gives you more mythological power. "You can build the smallest, cheapest, fastest temples and rush through the ages, but the guy who sits back and builds all the temples is going to have an advantage," Fischer says.

Ensemble has found that with more choices available early on, the number of strategies has mushroomed. Says Pottinger, "It's very different from the way we play AGE II, where everybody builds up till the third or fourth age and then they attack with 80 fully upgraded knights or whatever. We've seen in AGE OF MYTHOLOGY that there's really meaningful combat and lots of back and forth in the first age, and in the second age, and in the third age. So it really spreads that out and it gets the action and pacing going a lot quicker."

To complement the earlier power curve, games will play out faster. While many AGE OF EMPIRES II games took up to two hours, these games should be over in an hour or less. Codesigner Greg Street, who designed the AGE II CONQUERORS expansion, says, "We're giving the players knobs to turn if they want a longer game, but we'd like to skew the default game down. We learned a lot of lessons from AGE OF KINGS, where the player basically won, but the computer was fighting tenaciously to the last man. You had this painful flog to the enemy city, destroying his buildings. We're trying to make it so that you get to the fun part quicker and once you've won, it's over."

One of the ways they're doing that is by introducing fertile terrain and territorial control. The more fertile





"THE RAW FUN OF HAVING 30 OR 40 OR 80 UNITS RUSH ONTO THE SCREEN AND KILL SHIT—THAT'S STILL THERE."
—DAVE POTTINGER

terrain you have, the more food you can grow. Similarly, the more territory you control, the larger your population can grow. (But this also means you have more territory to defend, which makes you vulnerable.)

Fischer says, "If I come into your town and take it, I also take your fertile terrain slots, which gives me more units. I become more and more powerful, and you lose your ability to fight back. So that helps us to accelerate the game." It also means you can't build a transport ship and hide in the corner of the map anymore.

A Big Campaign—Seriously

One of the big surprises in AGE OF MYTHOLOGY is that it will have a major single-player campaign. Instead of the lackluster campaigns in AGE and AGE II, this campaign will have approximately 40 scenarios representing an estimated 50 hours of playing time. The scenarios will be linked by a huge story that takes players through all three cultures, and through circumstances that will never occur in random map or multiplayer games.

"Our goal for the single-player campaign was that we really wanted to tell a story that people could get into," says Street, who is responsible for producing the campaign. "We want them to be able to meet characters who return later in the story, to have recurring villains and companions who fall in battle, so there is a sense of tragedy and loss. Plot twists, a little bit of player deceit, surprise endings—those kinds of things."

The campaign will feature plenty of voice acting and in-engine cinematics. Street describes cinematics in which "characters talk about what happened, where they're going next, and then an assassin might jump out from behind a building. You'll actually see part of the story unfolding in between the battles.

"The maps are just gorgeous. In the campaign we can hand-tailor Egyptian cities on river deltas, and create glaciers and avalanches in the mountains where the Norse live. Players are really going to like seeing those environments."

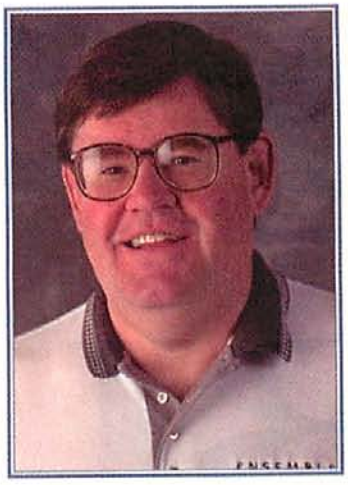
Advance to the Next Age

And on and on they went, talking long into the night about multiplayer and mummies, new game types they plan to include, an editor that lets users create their own scenarios, and many more features that most companies charge extra for in an add-on. And as I sat there with glazed eyes while they babbled about the improved artificial intelligence and online support, Bruce Shelley's words came back to me: The gods still do shape human existence. And they're going to keep you up long after midnight, too. CGW

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY INDEX

- **Number of names proposed:** 709
- **Number of builds to date:** 2,435
- **Hours of playtesting so far:** 600
- **Estimated hours of playtesting remaining:** 54,160
- **Pages in the script for the single-player campaign story:** 171
- **Cost of printing copies of the script for story committee review:** $534.86
- **Number of full-time designers on AGE II:** 2
- **Number of full-time designers on AOM:** 6
- **Number of penguins recorded at SeaWorld of Texas:** about 200
- **Years taken off the sound department's life after coming too close to a hungry lion:** 7
- **Favorite name not picked:** GREAT SOUNDTRACK PLUS FREE GAME
- **Number of guitars smashed Pete Townshend-style:** 1
- **Pounds of food (raw and cooked) abused for sound effects recording:** 40
- **Number of programming hours to date:** 94,000

AN INTERVIEW WITH BRUCE SHELLEY



Bruce Shelley is one of computer gaming's most celebrated designers and articulate thinkers. His 20-year career in game design spans pen-and-paper games and CIVILIZATION. A senior designer at Ensemble, Shelley helped evolve its development methodology and contributed to the design of AGE OF EMPIRES I and II.

How did the original AGE OF EMPIRES come about?

Originally we had a tank game demo that Angelo Laudon and (CEO) Tony Goodman had cooked up and an idea for a shipwreck game (survive, gather resources, build a boat, and escape the island). We dropped those after Tim Deen insisted we play WARCRAFT and we decided to add features from CIVILIZATION to an RTS.

What's the most interesting story about it that we've never heard?

The Japanese media asked us why our Asian buildings in AGE OF EMPIRES had blue roofs. The scientific answer was that we looked down on a Benihana restaurant from our old offices and it had a blue tile roof.

What are the strategic advantages of each culture in AGE OF MYTHOLOGY?

We want the different cultures to play differently, based on their economic power, the way they gather god favor, their mythological creatures, and the god powers available to them. In general terms, the Egyptians are a more economic culture. They gain favor by creating an imposing empire that is a tribute to their gods. The Norse must be more warlike to succeed. They gain favor by delighting their gods with the havoc they spread. The Greeks are somewhere between the other two.

How do you think strategy games will evolve over the next five years?

We will see more sim-type games in response to the success of The Sims, Roller Coaster Tycoon, and SimCity. Those games are particularly successful with non-hardcore gamers and help our industry reach many new people. A second trend we hope to see is improved infrastructure for multiplayer gaming. Too many potential multiplayers are turned off today by glitches or unpleasant experiences.

If you had godlike power over the games biz, what would you change?

I would make all game developers take the experience points they've earned and add them to their maturity score. Immaturity at the developer level (too many clones and not enough innovation, stuck in a gloomy graphics rut, emphasizing titillation over really engaging players' minds, product plans based on ego rather than business cases) results in too many disappointing games. This condition exists partly because too many executives are not knowledgeable about games. I would also prohibit games from being shipped until they worked properly and were actually entertaining.

by Charles Ardai

BLACK & WHITE™





CGW RATED

PROS

Intelligent autonomous characters, intriguing moral dilemmas, and a stunning 3D landscape combine to create a convincing illusion that you're looking after a real world.

CONS

The "invisible" interface can be difficult to learn and control.

It is rare for a computer game to inspire the sort of praise BLACK & WHITE has received, especially before it is even released. Three years in development, with legendary game designer Peter (POPULOUS) Molyneux at the helm, BLACK & WHITE has been hailed as a sort of second coming. No less an authority than the venerable *Computer Gaming World* called it "one of the five games that will change gaming forever," a claim happily trumpeted on the game's official website.

Now that the game has finally arrived, the obvious question is whether all the advance hosannas were deserved. A cynical observer, weaned on past instances of dashed hopes such as John Romero's stillborn DAIKATANA and the Jurassic-scale atrocity TRESPASSER, could be forgiven for fearing bad news.

But the news this time is good. BLACK & WHITE is everything its boosters said it would be: original, engrossing, moving, memorable, and provocative.

I do not believe, however, that it will change gaming forever—certainly not in the way that DOOM changed gaming by leading to a slew of copycat first-person shooters and ALONE IN THE DARK changed gaming by inspiring the TOMB RAIDER genre of third-person action-adventure games. The things that make BLACK & WHITE special are not easy to duplicate or even imitate. The game's originality lies not its graphical presentation (although it's a very good-looking game) or in the introduction of a new type of gameplay, but in its philosophical and dramatic qualities.

Put enough engineers and artists in a room and instruct them to copy DOOM and you'll get a reasonable facsimile in short order. But try to imitate BLACK & WHITE and you're likely to come up with a Frankenstein monster, all dead parts and no soul. Stripped down to its technical essentials, BLACK & WHITE is a combination of some very familiar game types: It's a strategic resource-management game, a

Love is in the air



Assigning jobs to your worshippers is a simple matter of picking them up and placing them next to their task. Here, two villagers are designated breeders and immediately get to work pumping up the population.



VILLAGE IDIOTS A town center burns at the hooves of an evil horse creature, and every threatened villager is known by name—if you use Microsoft Outlook. In that case, you can actually send email and receive messages from friends through villagers in the game.



PAINT JOB You can customize your creature in the Creature Cave with a simple tattooing interface. You can create your own decals as well.



GENTLE BEN In-engine cut-scenes advance the plot as well as introduce you to other creatures, like this towering bear.



TOWER OF POWER Your Temple is the center of your might—to fuel Miracles, worshippers generate prayer power here, or toss a human into the sacrificial bowl for a quick boost.



ANTI-THUNDERDOME Not all Miracles are offensive tools. The Physical Shield Miracle will throw a protective cage around vulnerable structures.



PARADISE FOUND Even early in the game, the island worlds you inhabit are sprawling land masses. That red ring shows the physical boundaries of your divine power.

Tamagotchi-style creature-development game, a quest-driven graphic adventure, even a basic sort of side-view fighting game. But that's like saying that, stripped to its essentials, the Bible is a tribal genealogy combined with an inconsistent pair of creation myths, some military history, some poetry, and some laws. There as here, the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts.

The Tiger not too smart, but nimble

Created in His Image

BLACK & WHITE casts you as a new god called into existence by the prayers of a primitive tribe in a land called Eden. A young couple, seeing their son about to be devoured by sharks, fall to their knees and beg for assistance. When you deliver the child from an untimely death, they promise to worship you forever. Their worship and the worship of their neighbors gives you power, and as you explore the land you begin to realize both the extent and the limits of this power. You exist only where people believe in you. In the territory of your Chosen People, you can uproot trees or hurl boulders with the flick of a finger, and even perform miracles if you've received enough prayers. But outside this territory you can't so much as stir up dust on the ground.

Your mission is to spread word of your power as far as possible, increasing your sphere of influence and your abilities. One by one, other tribes fall under your spell, and the red curtain that marks the edges of your influence expands and expands.

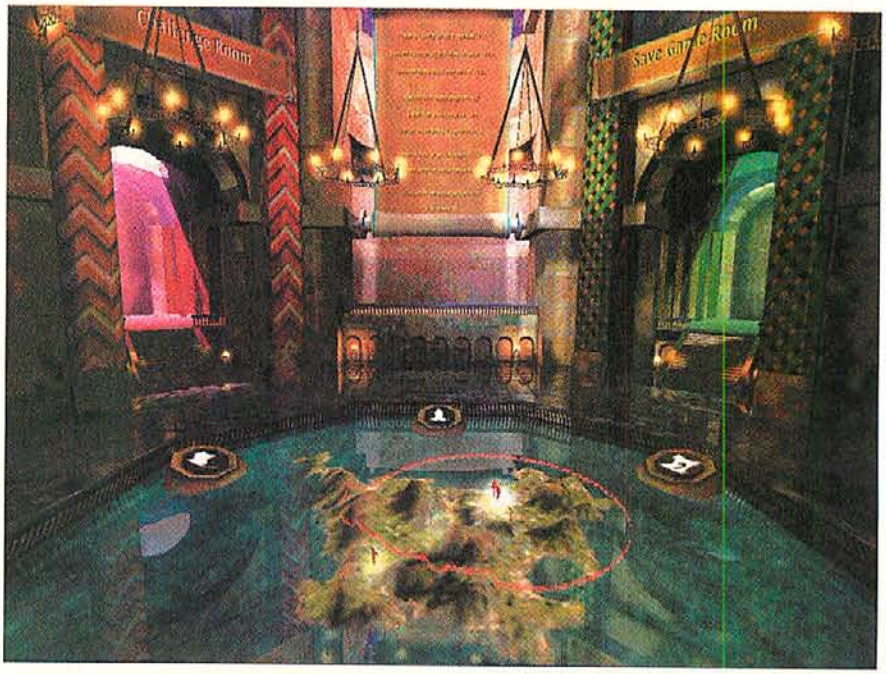
So far, so good. But there are other gods (that pesky first commandment notwithstanding), and they, too, wish to increase their power. So you have to protect your lands from encroachment while you try to invade theirs by performing marvels and sending in missionaries.

At this point, you might be getting the impression that BLACK & WHITE is a fairly conventional strategy game, the sort of tribe-managing, city-building, land-conquering game you find by the dozens in the bargain bins at CompUSA. And perhaps it would be were it not for two elements that transform the game utterly. First, it poses a series of moral conundrums and allows you to respond to them with the full range of approaches an omnipotent being might take, from benevolence to indifference to cruelty. Second, the game gives you an emissary on the ground, a giant animal pet that you train to do your bidding. And the two elements intertwine, since you can train your creature to be a saintly guide to the mortals below, a holy terror, or anything in between.

This is where the experience really



HOUSES OF THE HOLY The game pauses when you enter your temple, letting you check on your creature's abilities and various useful game stats.





Clash of the Titans

Creature battles take place in a mystical arena, and provide breaks from the contemplative pace of the overall strategy game. Here, a simple fighting game suddenly breaks out.

takes off into new territory. You've gone through a "how to move around the land" tutorial, you've run a few errands for grateful villagers, you've smashed some boulders and made cool ripples by plopping your giant finger in lakes, and just as you start wondering what BLACK & WHITE is really about, you're asked to choose one of three creatures to be your own—a cow, an ape, or a tiger. Each has its own characteristics (the cow is docile, the tiger aggressive, the ape a good mimic), but all three start out more or less as wet clay for you to form. Wide-eyed and innocent, your beast is equally likely to loaf in his pen outside your Temple or wander around the land, experimentally gobbling innocent villagers. It's up to you to teach him right from wrong. You do this by stroking him when you want him to understand that he's done something good or slapping and punching him when he's done something bad. This is perhaps the best example of the "invisible" interface:

The Ape not too stout, but smart

Instead of clicking on a "good boy" or "bad boy" icon, you simply move your giant hand in a rubbing motion over your creature's tummy or under his chin, or you swing it violently from side to side across his face or against his legs to sweep them out from under him.

The artificial intelligence the designers have built into your creature is impressive indeed. He has an autonomous existence and will learn by wandering around when you're not paying attention. You can accelerate his training and influence his behavior by putting him on one of three leashes, but like any parent in the real world you come to realize that what he turns into is as much a product of other influences in his environment as it is of your hard work. There are hundreds of villagers wandering around too, and they interact with your creature and with each other. After seeing you do something a few times, your creature is likely to start doing it himself—don't be surprised if you return to your home base only to find your darling little ape performing miracles and carrying out projects for the villagers. (Or, if you've trained him perversely, eating his own feces and stomping on little children.)

Meanwhile, you've got projects of your own, or at least requests to attend to. While the game allows you to just play around in the richly simulated world for as long as you like, if you want the story to progress you have to carry out various quests called up by clicking on gold and silver scrolls that dot the landscape. These quests have many possible outcomes: Asked by a weeping woman to find her sick brother who has wandered off, you can bring him back safely, or you can find him, kill him, drop his corpse at the woman's feet, and destroy her house.

The choice you make will not only



Requirements: Pentium-II 350, 64MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III 500, 128MB RAM. **3D Support:** Direct3D
Multiplayer: LAN, Internet (2-8 players).

Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: Lionhead Studios • $40 • www.blackandwhite.ea.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; comic mischief, violence.

TOUCH MY MONKEY Rewarding your creature is a simple matter of stroking him when he pleases you. And take note of the high Hunger rating and corresponding thinness of this ape.



affect that particular quest, it will also begin to alter your appearance and that of your creature's and your land. Do enough evil and your hand turns into a demon's claw ordering a pointy-toothed monster that moves about a blood-red land populated by terrified slaves. Do enough good and your creature begins to glow with golden light while your people sing and dance and beget new generations of happy little worshippers.

Gods and Monsters

BLACK & WHITE is a difficult game to summarize because in some sense it contains all of human experience: birth and death, seasons and storms, disasters and triumphs, and all the minutiae in between. Watching days pass in Eden is a little like watching an extraordinarily sophisticated ant farm, or the miniature societies in the famous novella *Sandkings*, which I would bet was one of this game's inspirations. If the game has any shortcoming, it's that the game elements sometimes intrude on this sublimely realistic simulation. The interface for moving around the landscape is invisible, which is good. But it's also often awkward and hard to control. Use the mouse and you find the screen rotating when you meant to move laterally. Use the keyboard and you find yourself overshooting your target and ramming into mountains. Similarly, when a villager is begging for housing or your creature needs water and you can't respond because you can't remember how, it's a needless frustration.

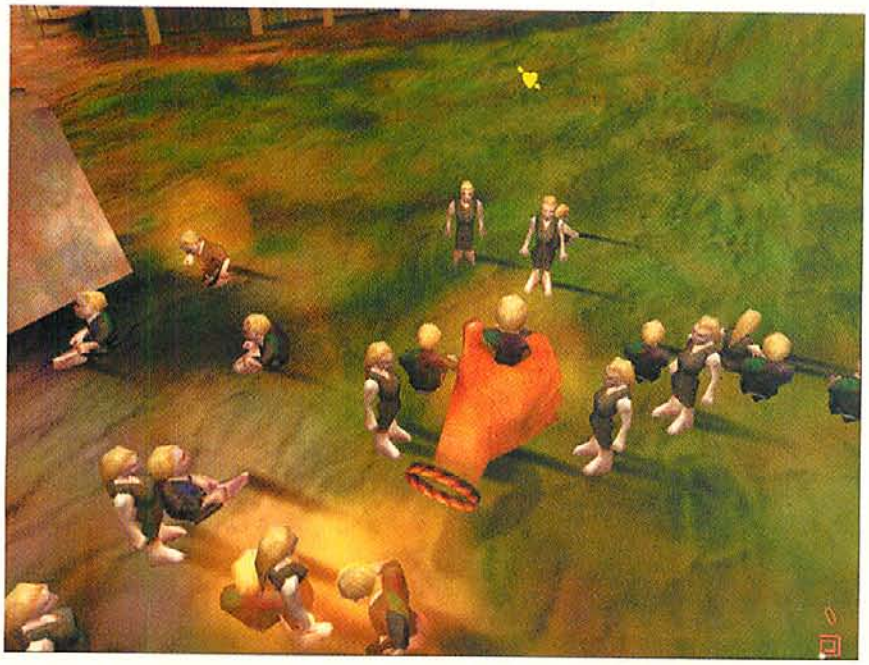
The Cow not too fast, but sturdy

But then there are all the touches that make up for it: the little things, like the way your creature gets bruised and scarred in his fights, and the way those marks stay with him, realistically, as he ages. Or the way your creature shies away from your touch after you've hit him. Or the way the game's quests knit together and allow for multiple solutions, not to mention the way even a well-intentioned god can fail. When a screaming wife called out to me, saying that her husband and five other sailors were drowning, I saved as many as I could, but her husband turned out to be one of those I didn't get to in time. The expression on her face and in her voice when she said, "I understand; you did as much as you could" sent a chill down my spine.

When was the last time a game did that?

I have to think back years, to sequences like the opening of ULTIMA IV or the death of Floyd in PLANETFALL. Those were outstanding games, too—sui generis in many ways and not, as it turned out, easy to replicate. Like them, I suspect that BLACK & WHITE will not so much change gaming forever as it will change individual gamers forever.

True artistic achievement is rare and irreproducible, and precious when it's found. BLACK & WHITE is such an achievement, and it is one of those games people will still be talking about twenty years from now. CGW



Black

in the beginning

Choosing light over dark, good over evil, I began to serve the people of Eden, plucking the sick and delirious from the harsh wilderness and assisting travelers eager to explore this wondrous new world. And it was, well, good. Even in those early days, the effort required to maintain benevolence was daunting, but it was tremendously rewarding.

When my creature—my child—and I discovered each other, my toil was doubled but so was my sense of reward. Gently guiding my innocent charge through the unknown landscape was taxing indeed, but the joy I felt as he exercised his blossoming knowledge and abilities, eagerly demonstrating his growing compassion by healing and feeding our worshippers and watering their withering crops, made it all worthwhile. His wounded expression as I was forced to punish him for carelessly eating a villager pained me; yet how strangely satisfying it was to reward him for no reason at all other than to make him happy. He asked for so little, how could I deny him our occasional games of fetch with the giant ball we had earned for one of our good deeds?

But our exploration of this new world eventually brought us face to face with evil, from the vicious ogre who countered my creature's friendly overtures with a sound beating to the far more terrifying display of Nemesis' power as he murdered the only friend my creature had ever known.

We traveled to a new land and my creature blossomed under my gentle guidance, healing the villagers who idolized us and dancing for their amusement. We were happy then, spreading peace and harmony throughout the land, creating new forests filled with butterflies and gently turning the minds of Nemesis' slaves by showering gifts of food and wood upon them.

Hewing to the path of good was never harder than when my creature was taken from me. The excruciating process of building a following as I inched my way to where Nemesis' foul avatar tortured my friend was difficult, but I knew the people would suffer should I stray. However, when Nemesis reclaimed a town I had finally won over, hatred poisoned my heart and I reduced the hamlet to smoldering ruin with lightning and fireballs.

It was then that I began to hear the unbelievable: the voice, the ghostly whisper of some unknown deity clearly speaking my true, actual name. Who was this? At first I didn't believe it was happening. It certainly wasn't the familiar voices dueling in my conscience. Was it my better nature calling me back to my true self? Or perhaps the spirits of evil, insidiously beckoning me to their cause? I know not—but I am again walking in the light, working to free my creature, hoping my righteousness will silence the voice that haunts me.

White

Choosing dark over light, black over white, I began to torment the souls of Eden. And what better way to torment them than with a savage tiger? After choosing Bob, I began to mold him in my own image. Step one, tie Bob to a tree and beat him. For five minutes solid. Step two, force him to consume his own feces repeatedly. There's only one way to make a fist of doom out of a 20-foot-tall lump of fur and teeth, and that's through massive psychological trauma.

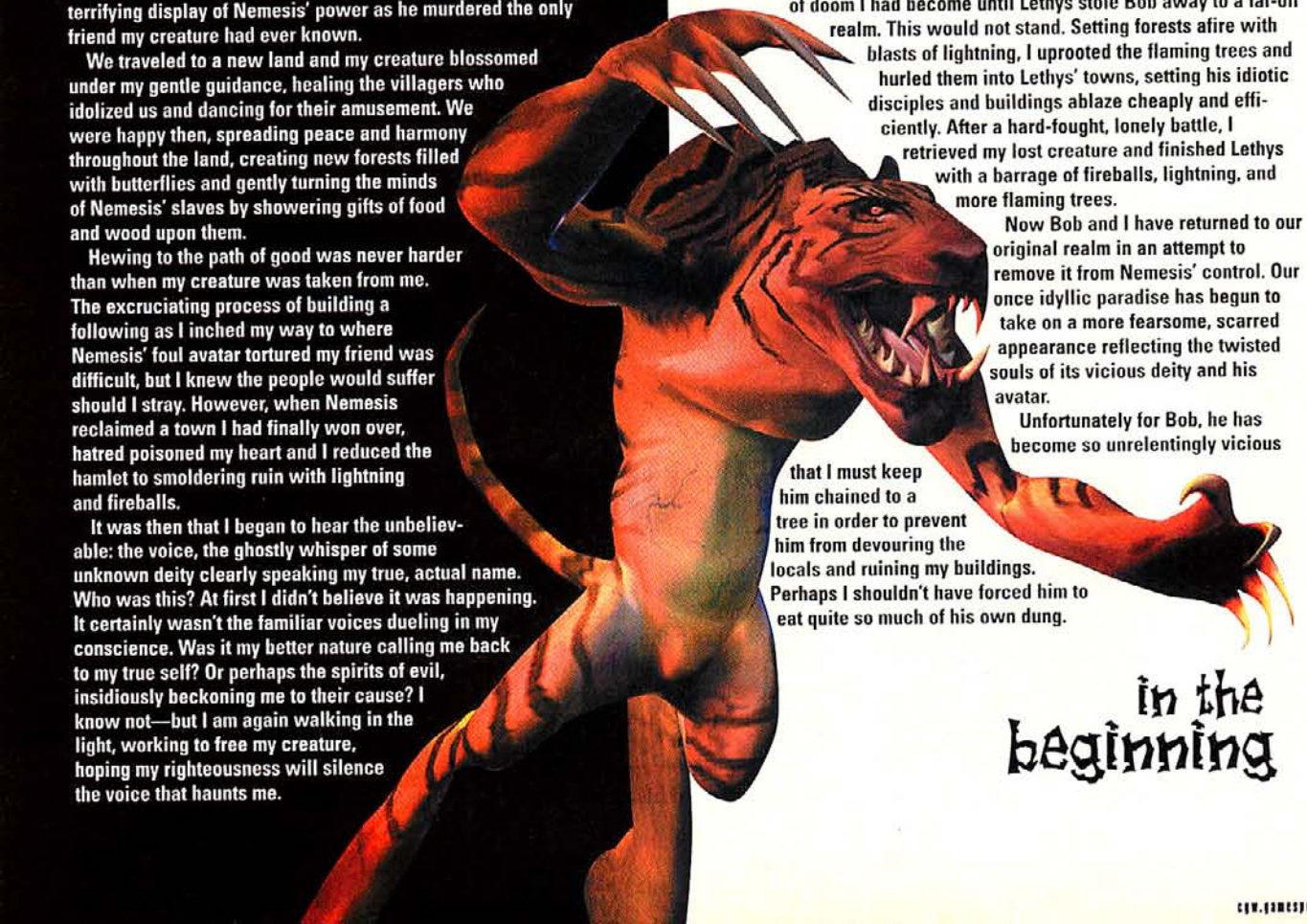
After the beatings had ceased, Bob and I began to explore the land. In time, my power grew, thanks in part to the regular sacrificing of village children upon the altars of my temple. Bob developed a taste for children, and would soon learn to chase and consume the little buggers with a vengeance. But while gluttonous murder of the young was a fine occupation for a hand of evil, I felt that Bob's time could be used in a much more constructive way. And so I began a new regimen of beatings. Bob grew angrier and darker, stalking the land in a smoldering state of near-constant fury.

Eventually, we were forced to seek refuge from Nemesis in a new realm. But in this new land Bob and I were not alone. Lethys and Kazarr, evil and good gods respectively, were also present. Kazarr considered me an ally and proved a pushover. Bob enjoyed the tender vittles of his villagers and children immensely. In fact, Bob managed to win me a small village of Kazarr's completely on his own, mainly by kicking over houses and defecating on the locals. My black heart swelled with pride.

I didn't fully realize just how attached to my striped instrument of doom I had become until Lethys stole Bob away to a far-off realm. This would not stand. Setting forests afire with blasts of lightning, I uprooted the flaming trees and hurled them into Lethys' towns, setting his idiotic disciples and buildings ablaze cheaply and efficiently. After a hard-fought, lonely battle, I retrieved my lost creature and finished Lethys with a barrage of fireballs, lightning, and more flaming trees.

Now Bob and I have returned to our original realm in an attempt to remove it from Nemesis' control. Our once idyllic paradise has begun to take on a more fearsome, scarred appearance reflecting the twisted souls of its vicious deity and his avatar.

Unfortunately for Bob, he has become so unrelentingly vicious that I must keep him chained to a tree in order to prevent him from devouring the locals and ruining my buildings. Perhaps I shouldn't have forced him to eat quite so much of his own dung.



in the beginning

Computer Gaming World's

Hall of Fame

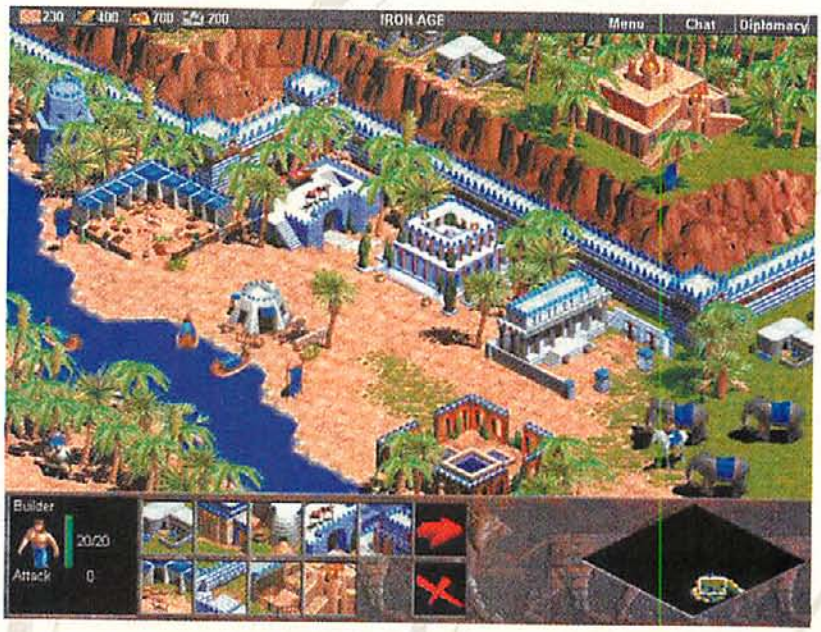
The Cooperstown of computer games welcomes two classics and a game design legend

Age of Empires

It's been three and a half years since AGE OF EMPIRES was released, but the name still resonates with gamers like the klaxon call of a village under attack. From the day we first played it, it was obvious from the scenic tableaux, wonderfully articulated units, and evocative music that the game was in a class by itself. But it was the depth of that intoxicating mix of CIVILIZATION and WARCRAFT II that really hooked us, forcing us to return each day for a random map or multiplayer fix.

There are a dozen reasons why this game appealed to gamers: the varied races, the wonders, the victory conditions, the pitched battles, the masterfully balanced units and cultures. But its appeal transcended gamers. Nongamers found it just as compelling, because of its historical underpinnings and intuitively understandable units.

AGE OF EMPIRES was also significant for being Microsoft's first good game. It was a runaway success, selling 2.2 million units and paving the way for the RISE OF ROME expansion (1.2 million units sold), and AGE OF KINGS, the new bestseller set in the Middle Ages. The game gave Microsoft instant credibility, turned Ensemble Studios into a strategy powerhouse, and set a new benchmark in real-time strategy gaming. After nearly four years, Ensemble's wonder still stands.





Will Wright

It is simply impossible to overstate Will Wright's contribution to computer gaming. Or maybe we should say it's SIM-ply impossible. Because with those three letters—SIM—Will Wright, over the course of the past 14 years, has created some of the best games ever made. Wright cemented his reputation with his very first game, 1984's RAID ON BUNGELING BAY for the C64, but no one was prepared for what came next.

In 1987, Wright unleashed SIMCITY on the world, and it was the kind of rare, phenomenal crossover success that every game designer dreams of but only a handful ever achieve. In

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six

Released the same year as fellow Hall of Famer HALF-LIFE, RAINBOW SIX is arguably the more influential of the two games. After all, has anyone felt compelled to create a HALF-LIFE Xen mission mod for RAINBOW SIX? Nope. But the wildly popular COUNTER-STRIKE mod for HALF-LIFE is a concrete expression of how thoroughly gripping the realistic antiterrorist action of RAINBOW SIX is.

RAINBOW SIX broke most of the rules of first-person shooters and made them work. The "one man against the world" mold was shattered as lone-wolf gamers were forced to command and coordinate their elite team of antiterrorists intelligently. Teamwork was so essential that RAINBOW SIX introduced a detailed 3D mission-planning interface that has been aped by competitors but never matched. The easy adrenaline of nonstop FPS carnage was replaced with long stretches of gameplay where nothing happened—nothing, that is, except the buildup of such nerve-fraying tension that the short, blistering firefights with the enemy almost came as a relief. Oh, and that whole "one shot, one kill" thing? You can thank RAINBOW SIX for that. This is the game that spawned the tactical simulation genre.

Did we have to induct RAINBOW SIX into our Hall of Fame? Probably. If we hadn't, it would have just drawn up a detailed action plan and infiltrated the Hall under cover of darkness anyway.



1987, SIMCITY was a game that everyone wanted to play. Not just guys, not just gamers—everyone. SIMCITY transcended genres, genders, and age groups with a concept as radical as it was simple. There were no guns, no puzzles, and no endgame. The game was nothing more (or less) than a giant sandbox, in which each gamer's own creativity and imagination played as big a part in the experience as any single line of code. Create your own city, in your own way, and lord over it as a god? Who wouldn't want to do that?

With last year's THE SIMS Wright did it again. Easily the best game of 2000, THE SIMS was another cultural phenomenon, with an outrageously simple premise (grow your own people), that transcended all social boundaries. THE SIMS reaffirmed what we knew all along: Will Wright is some scary kind of genius. Let's be glad he's applying himself to computer games. Because he could own us all if he wanted to.

People

Dani Bunten Berry, Game Designer
John Carmack, Game Designer
Sid Meier, Game Designer

Games

Alone in the Dark (I-Motion, 1992)
The Bard's Tale (EA, 1985)
Battle Chess (Interplay, 1988)
Battleground series (TalonSoft, 1995–present)
Betrayal at Krondor (Dynamix, 1993)
Chessmaster (Software Toolworks, 1986)
Civilization (MicroProse, 1991)
Command & Conquer (Virgin/Westwood Studios, 1995)
Crusader: No Remorse (Origin, 1995)
Day of the Tentacle (LucasArts, 1993)
Diablo (Blizzard, 1997)
DOOM (id Software, 1993)
Dungeon Master (FTL Software, 1987)
Earl Weaver Baseball (EA, 1986)
Empire (Interstel, 1978)
F-19 Stealth Fighter (MicroProse, 1988)
Falcon 3.0 (Spectrum Holobyte, 1991)
Fallout (Interplay, 1997)
Front Page Sports: Football Pro (Dynamix, 1993)
Gettysburg: The Turning Point (SSI, 1986)
Grim Fandango (LucasArts, 1999)
Gunship (MicroProse, 1986)
Half-Life (Sierra, 1999)
Harpoon (360 Pacific, 1989)
Heroes of Might & Magic II (New World Computing, 1997)
Kampfgruppe (SSI, 1985)
King's Quest V (Sierra On-Line, 1990)
Lemmings (Psygnosis, 1991)
Links 386 Pro (Access Software, 1992)
M-1 Tank Platoon (MicroProse, 1989)
Master of Magic (MicroProse, 1994)
Master of Orion (MicroProse, 1993)
Mech Brigade (SSI, 1985)
MechWarrior 2 (Activision, 1995)
Might & Magic (New World Computing, 1986)
M.U.L.E. (EA, 1983)
Myth (Bungie, 1997)
Panzer General (SSI, 1994)
Sid Meier's Pirates! (MicroProse, 1987)
Quake (id Software, 1996)
Railroad Tycoon (MicroProse, 1990)
Red Baron (Dynamix, 1990)
The Secret of Monkey Island (LucasArts, 1990)
SimCity (Maxis, 1987)
StarCraft (Blizzard, 1998)
Starflight (EA, 1986)
Tetris (Spectrum Holobyte, 1988)
Their Finest Hour (LucasArts, 1989)
TIE Fighter (LucasArts, 1994)
Tomb Raider (Eidos, 1996)
Ultima III (Origin Systems, 1983)
Ultima IV (Origin Systems, 1985)
Ultima VI (Origin Systems, 1990)
Ultima Underworld (Origin Systems, 1992)
War in Russia (SSI, 1984)
WarCraft II (Blizzard, 1996)
Wasteland (Interplay, 1986)
Wing Commander (Origin Systems, 1990)
Wing Commander II (Origin Systems, 1991)
Wing Commander III (Origin Systems, 1994)
Wizardry (Sir-Tech, 1981)
Wolfenstein 3-D (id Software, 1992)
X-COM (MicroProse, 1994)
You Don't Know Jack (Berkeley Systems, 1996)
Zork (Infocom, 1981)

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REVIEWS

"It's my busy time of year."—*Tony Soprano*

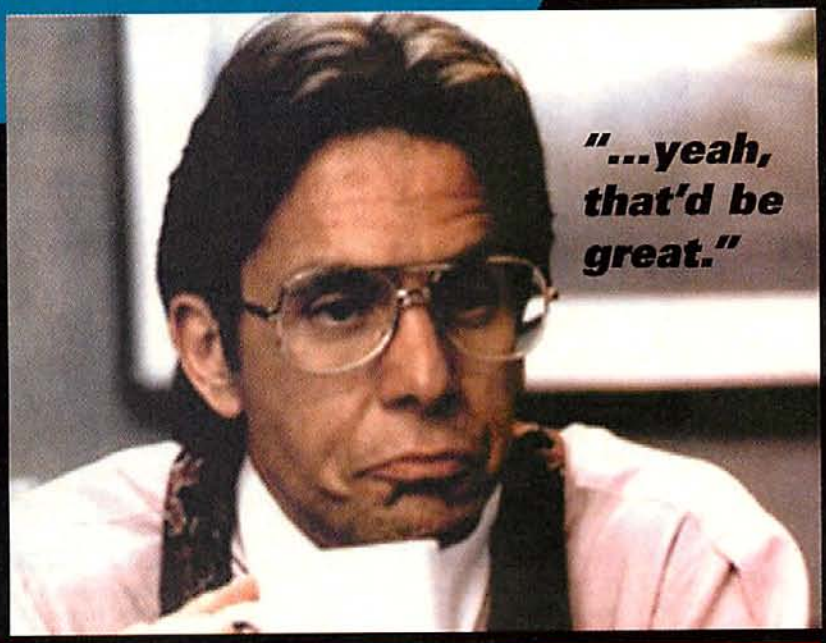
It's our busy time too, although not because of robust bookmaking during the playoffs. No, for gamers, this time of year is filled with the chirping of red-breasted robins, an explosion of color in all the blossoming trees, and the fresh clean air of a new spring day all just outside the windows we cover up to reduce the glare on our computer monitors. Yes, the first big surge of the year's most anticipated games is upon us with the release of titles like BLACK & WHITE, HIGH HEAT 2002 and TRIBES 2.

It happens like this every spring. Some developers are determined not to show their game for a third (or even fourth) time at E3; they rush those babies out so we won't forget them in the mad melee of the Staples Center.

We don't mind. So many games come out at the end of the year when we're really busy, and really don't have time to play games, and really feel bad about avoiding work and playing them anyway. Not this time. In fact, once I finish writing these very words, I'm headed into the *CGW* gaming lab to install TRIBES 2, a game I've been weak-kneed about ever since E3 '99. And it's here! Boxed copies just arrived this morning and it's here, it's here, it's here (Copy Editor – just fill in the rest of the page with "it's here," because after all, it is here and I want to play it).

Damn. Can't get away with it. Oh well. The really amazing thing is that with all these great games on my desk, I'm still playing COUNTER-STRIKE. I even got resident curmudgeon Jeff Green to go online and play it with me the other day. How was it? Let's just say Jeff puts the "ew" in "newbie." Yeah, Jeff? I'm gonna ask you to go ahead and not pop that flash bang right in front of my face. Yeah, that'd be great. Jeez, I can't wait to play TRIBES 2 with him.

Anyway, what are you playing—or looking forward to playing—this spring? Drop me a line at Tom_Price@ziffdavis.com. Jeff and I will be working on the concept of cover fire, unless he wants to find out what "getting fragged" used to mean back in the army. —*Tom Price*

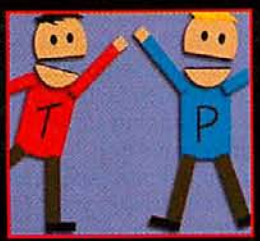


JUNE REVIEWS

GAME	RATING
Black & White	★★★★★
Fallout Tactics	★★★★½
High Heat Major League Baseball 2002	★★★★★
Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter	★★★★★
Europa Universalis	★★★½★
Star Trek: Away Team	★★★★★
Blade of Darkness	★★★½★
Moon Project	★★★½★
Age of Sail II	★★★½★
NBA Live	★★★★★
Triple Play	★½★★★
Worms World Party	★★★★★
Battle for Naboo	★★★★★
StarPeace	★★★★★
Industry Giant	★★★★★
The Corporate Machine	★★★★★

HOW DO WE RATE? We review only finished games — no betas, no patches.

★★★★★



OUTSTANDING The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience.

★★★★½



VERY GOOD Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.

★★★½★



AVERAGE Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.

★★½★★



WEAK Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.

★½★★★



ABYSMAL The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.



ONE SHOT, SEVERAL KILLS Every squad should contain at least one sniper character with the following perks: Better Criticals, Sharpshooter, More Criticals, Sniper, Light Step, Ghost, Death Sense, Bonus Rate of Fire, and Strong Back. Take control of a tower and go to town.

A horribly irradiated Uncle Sam wants you!

Steel Yourself

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

FALLOUT TACTICS: BROTHERHOOD OF STEEL

reviewed by Raphael Liberatore

Picture this: the world nuked to the brink of oblivion. Generations later, those surviving the initial destruction trickle out of their protective vaults deep beneath the earth, only to discover a bitter wasteland awash in radiation and populated by Mutants, Beastlords, and Ghouls. Pockets of unarmed civilians barely survive, existing on little more than hope while Raiders and Mutants rule the land. Somewhere in the wasteland, a fraternity of austere warriors expands its control, hell-bent on rebuilding a livable and thriving world. These warriors will not stop until those standing in their way are destroyed. They are the Brotherhood of Steel.

Welcome to FALLOUT TACTICS: BROTHERHOOD OF STEEL, a very intense squad-based tactical game steeped in the FALLOUT franchise's signature atmosphere. Bit players in the first two FALLOUT games, the militaristic Brotherhood of Steel (BOS) members are the stars here, slaughtering their way across the blighted landscape in a game that retains many of the franchise's RPG trappings even as it shifts focus to hardcore strategic combat.

Brothers in Arms

Your primary objective is to lead a squad of up to six Brotherhood members in 20 long missions, saving towns from mutant attacks, sabotaging power generators, and engaging in direct combat on very large maps. If you're moving your squad without tactical cohesion, you're basically asking for trouble. This is one tough game, so rushing around and looking for living targets without utilizing fire and movement, cover fire, and counter-ambush techniques will get you killed faster than you can reload. Success hinges on luring enemies into vicious ambushes, setting up lethal fields of combined fire, and stealthily maneuvering snipers to both weaken enemy numbers and provide long-range cover for your assault teams. It's tense, nail-biting stuff, thanks in large part to some brutal enemy AI.

Adding to the game's depth are the inherent challenges in each of three different game modes. There's a continuous turn-based mode (CTB), in which all characters can act at the same time; individual turn-based mode (ITB), in which characters move singly in a classic initiative-based sequence; and squad turn-based mode (STB), which is ideal for multiplayer, with entire squads exchanging turns. CTB is by far the most challenging to master. Everything is in real time, so when enemies spot you sneaking up to their heavily fortified bunker, your troops better be ready to go tactical, because delays

CGW RATED



PROS

Great squad-based strategy in a game that retains and builds upon the spirit of the FALLOUT franchise.

CONS

No co-op multiplayer mode; command bunker barter system needs streamlining.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266, 64MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III, 128MB RAM.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer:** Internet, LAN (2-18 players).

Publisher: Interplay • Developer: Microforte • $45 • www.interplay.com • ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood and violence.

can be costly. Unlike in STB mode, you won't have time to stop and come up with a more deliberate plan.

Sell Low, Buy High

The bitter reality of post-apocalypse life forces you to scavenge from enemies in order to bolster your equipment and arsenal. While you can obviously use what you salvage, you'll mostly sell these items at the command bunker between missions. This lets you interact with the game's biggest drawback: the command bunker's barter system. Equipping units for each mission is almost tediously time-consuming. Some missions require special items for success, but instead of the Brotherhood just coughing up the goods at the start of the mission, you're forced to buy them at inflated prices. God forbid you find yourself short on cash when you need one of these items. And why doesn't the medical officer just heal your squad? Why is he another merchant selling at ridiculous prices?

Most weapons and equipment are carryovers from the original game, with some unique additions. The coolest? The ability to drive a variety of vehicles, from Hummers and dune buggies to APCs and tanks. Nothing beats shredding enemy positions to ribbons with machine gunners as you drive by.

Perps, Perks, and Jerks

As in an RPG, each successful encounter or mission earns you experience points. The more experience you earn, the more skill points, traits, ranks, perks, and reputation you gain. The developers have smartly deleted many of FALLOUT 1 and 2's perks and traits in favor of those supporting this game's combat focus. Part of the game's underlying strategy is building a solid team by delegating skills and perks to each squad member, enhancing your team with a variety of combat and support elements.

Not everyone on the team needs to be a combat god. A character or two should have higher medical and science skills than combat-oriented skills. Trust me, there's plenty of opportunity throughout the game to utilize these skills, and not having them will result in frequent reloads. As the game progresses, you can swap injured or irradiated squad members for battle-fresh characters—including ghouls and ferocious deathclaws—at the command bunker.



GOING MY WAY? Some of the missions provide vehicles for use. Here, a heavily armored squad escorts a tracked vehicle toting a bright and shiny nuclear warhead.

Like RPGs, FALLOUT TACTICS follows a highly developed, if linear, story. Yep, you've got to save the world. Voice acting and ambient sounds are great throughout, but I missed the occasional animated NPC cut-scenes that were highlights of the earlier FALLOUT games.

Still, just about every other facet of the game is done to perfection. There's tons of in-mission information, the character interfaces are a snap to navigate, and the graphics are a higher-resolution, more detailed version of the familiar FALLOUT brand of horrible beauty. The only thing lacking is a cooperative multiplayer mode for the game's 20 missions. With a variety of *mano a mano* multiplayer contests, all of which let multiple players per side participate, why can't you battle your way through the game together à la Interplay's own BALDUR'S GATE?



HAMBURGER ALLEY Avoid grouping characters in the middle of a firefight. Keeping them separated not only prevents them from shooting each other in the back, but also means they won't all die like this team when the enemy starts firing rocket launchers.

There's not a hardcore gamer alive who wouldn't enjoy this game. The engrossing atmosphere and length of gameplay mixed with replayability and multiplayer features puts FALLOUT TACTICS right in the thick of Strategy Game of the Year contenders. Do you have what it takes to join the Brotherhood of Steel? If so, hurry up and enlist before combat passes you by. CGW

FALLOUT WARFARE

Available on the bonus CD shipping with the pre-ordered version of the game, FALLOUT WARFARE is a pen-and-paper version of FALLOUT TACTICS and should be instantly familiar to anyone who (like me) cut their gaming teeth on games like AD&D.

My brother and I, out to prove who had the best mix of old-school role-playing strategy and tactics skills, pulled out the dice and created our armies. I went with an army of Brotherhood of Steel paladins, while he went with the odd combo of robots and deathclaws. We dove into a premade "skirmish" scenario and deployed our forces without spilling any of our soda or beer. The fairly simple rules sped up gameplay. My brother went all out, whipping out a tape measure to measure his robots' line of sight as they charged my position. Luckily, my snipers were in good position to inflict some damage before he approached my machine-gun bunkers. As Little Lord Dumbpants forgot to use cover, my brilliantly positioned forces opened up a Can of Man on him, hosing his assault within an hour of dice rolling. All in all, it was pretty fun and looks to be a great way to enjoy the essence of FALLOUT TACTICS when one of those California blackouts shuts down my PC.

Buy now, patch later

Say It Ain't So, 3DO

Imagine Mark McGwire unleashing the raw ferocity of his swing on a meaty fastball served up right over the heart of the plate. The stadium roars with excitement, leaping to their feet to gape in awe as...as the slugger just reaches first base safely, the ball having barely blooped over the shortstop. Sadly, it seems that the bat of the most feared slugger of his time was infested with termites, so riddled with weakening tunnels it burst into a cloud of sawdust upon striking the ball. Only McGwire's prodigious power got him as far as first.

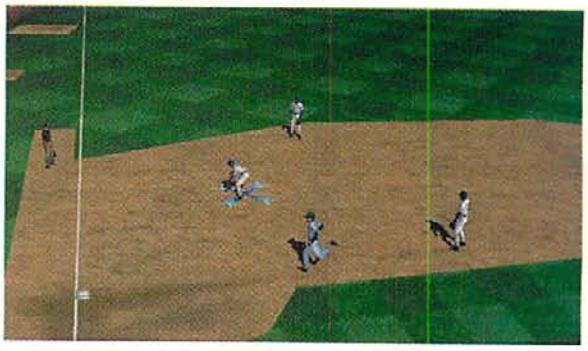
So it is with this year's version of HIGH HEAT. It's still the best baseball game out there. It might even be the best sports game you can buy. But as with last year's version, and the version before that, fans of this series are being asked to wait one or two months for a patch to make the game complete.

HIGH HEAT MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2002

reviewed by Robert Coffey

And that's a real shame, because HIGH HEAT 2002 builds on this title's legacy of capturing its sport better than any game ever has. While it's easy to credit the obvious graphical upgrade that results in more detailed player models and some really sharp-looking ballparks, it's the HIGH HEAT team's continuing attention to detail that really enriches the experience. For example, a slew of new animations at first base give every groundout a more realistic look and feel. First basemen dig throws out of the dirt, stab errant throws above their heads, and so on. To paraphrase humorless baseball aficionado George Will, there's nothing routine about a routine ground ball. HIGH HEAT 2002 captures that sentiment perfectly.

Gone is the less than riveting play-by-play announcing of Ted Robinson, replaced by a two-man booth that usually works. While it rarely sounds as if they're actually talking to each other, the exciting delivery and nifty player-specific commentary of Dave O'Brien and Ray Fosse is a nice upgrade. So too is the real-life stadium announcer to enhance that ballpark ambience. There are lots of other new features and options this year—you can move the pitcher on the rubber, your catcher can make snap-throws; you get rain, and 40-man rosters at the season's end—all of them fleshing out a fantastic, stat-driven baseball sim.

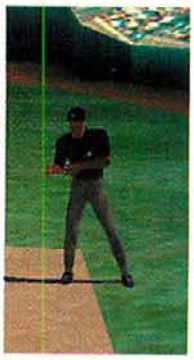


WHAT GOES UP DOESN'T COME DOWN At least not in the buggy confines of Wrigley Field, where notorious cement-foot Jason Giambi legs out an improbable inside-the-infield home run.

But this year's bugs are the worst yet. Previous versions of the game had the sorts of flaws that marred the game; these bugs kill it. The game periodically crashed to my desktop, and the sound is prone to skipping, occasionally through every sound bite on the CD. An apparent gravity well has appeared over Wrigley Field, resulting in pop-ups that never return to Earth. But the killer, the one bug that can utterly trash a season, comes via a new feature, suspensions. While you might like the idea of player suspensions for bad behavior, realize this: I lost Miguel Tejada for seven days for rushing the mound. The game absolutely refused to let me replace him in the lineup, claiming that every able-bodied player I tried to put in his spot was injured. Halfway through the season I had to start from scratch because I couldn't progress in the schedule.

HIGH HEAT 2002 is still a no-doubt purchase for PC baseball fans. I can't imagine not playing at least one game a day for the next year. But I also can't imagine being able to truly relax and enjoy another season until this year's version is patched. CGW





CLOSE CALL Some new animations are more complex, such as the sequence involved in appealing a checked swing and receiving a strike call.

CGW RATED

PROS

Unquestionably the best baseball game – and possibly the best sports game – on the market.

CONS

This franchise's "wait for the patch" mentality is wearing thin.

Requirements: Pentium 200 MMX, 32MB RAM, 110MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II, 64MB RAM, 300MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer:** LAN, Internet, Hotseat (2 players).

Publisher: 3DO • Developer: 3DO • $40 • www.3do.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

HEART OF WINTER is better in the long run than in the quest

Heartbreaker

ICEWIND DALE: HEART OF WINTER

reviewed by Thierry Nguyen

Suppose that right now the Tolkien estate releases a novella entitled *Ride of the Nazgul.* It's a quick read, around a hundred pages, and takes place on the sidelines during the main *Lord of the Rings* saga. The tale itself doesn't add very much to the mythos, but it happens to contain an appendix—say, "lost passages," notes, and paragraphs—that, when read with the larger work as a whole, manages to make the saga a better read. The *Nazgul* narrative is on the throwaway side, but all the extra material helps flesh out the overall tale.

This is what the HEART OF WINTER expansion pack does for ICEWIND DALE. The new side quest, involving a war between the Barbarians and the Ten-Towns is average filler, but the changes made to the overall game may make this add-on worth it to hardcore fans of the original.

In terms of geography, it adds two "towns" (one's populated like an actual town, while the other is more like a staging area) and three multilevel dungeons. If these were large, complex dungeons like the original game's Severed Hand or Dorn's Deep, I wouldn't be complaining. But these new dungeons are more like the Vale of Shadows—that is, loosely connected pockets of monster areas waiting for your party to sally forth and clean them out.

I took my original ICEWIND DALE party, which was around Level 11, and burned through the new quest in about a day. An average gamer, with a lower-level party (such as the premade Level 9 one) could still finish this in about three sessions. Some of the dungeons had keen new enemies, but the others relied on mob tactics involving some of the more annoying monsters. Truth be told, I thought the town of Lonelywood, with its various subquests and characters, was better designed than the dungeons themselves.

A giveaway play tip: Whenever you get the chance to go back to Lonelywood between dungeons, take that chance. Talk to everyone, and something new and interesting is bound to come up.

With such a lackluster quest and dungeon set, why bother getting the add-on? Because the original ICEWIND DALE suddenly becomes a lot more fun to play. Many of the character classes have additional abilities to make them more useful. The higher XP (experience points) cap allows for hugely powerful player characters; more spells, both useful and flashy; and a bunch of new loot. Technical enhancements, like higher resolutions and new and useful hot-keys, round out the picture.

To let you really take advantage of those new abilities, there's now the Heart of Fury (HOF) mode, in which enemies get boosted with ridiculous hit points and corresponding XP values. A goblin in HOF mode, for example, now has several hundred hit points and gives around 2,000 XP instead of 15. Exposing a werewolf nets you around 800,000 XP. Battle tactics are suitably altered, since you now have to use tougher spells to take down the beefed-up critters.

Of course, all this is irrelevant if you don't plan on replaying the original ICEWIND DALE journey but just want to see the new areas. It's tricky to balance the relative worth of new content versus enhancing content, and it depends on what you're looking for. Me, I merely slogged through the new stuff, but having my party unleash Power Word: Kill onto a pack of shivering, squirmy little goblins made it all worth it. CGW



LIKE A BANSHEE Tough battles, like these mages, call for new and powerful spells such as Great Shout.



CLASH OF THE—Y'KNOW... New spells require new enemies to inflict them upon. HOW could have used more, though.

CGW RATED

PROS
It makes the entire game a slicker, more grandiose adventure.

CONS
The "new" content is slimmer than a starving elf.

Requirements: Pentium 233 MMX or faster, 32MB RAM, 300MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 266, 64MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** OpenGL **Multiplayer:** LAN, TCP/IP, modem, serial (null modem).

Publisher: Interplay • Developer: Black Isle • $30 • www.interplay.com/icewind • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence.

My kingdom for a counter-reformation

Sic Transit Gloria Mundi

The next time someone tells you that computer games are for kids, hand him a copy of EUROPA UNIVERSALIS and ask him to tell you what the Treaty of Tordesillas was. Without looking at the manual. Then smack him with it. The manual, not the treaty.

EUROPA UNIVERSALIS is nothing less than an attempt to simulate the historical development of Europe and its colonial expansion in an entertaining game format. However, rather than being just another empire-building CIVILIZATION clone, EUROPA UNIVERSALIS makes historical events like the above-mentioned treaty (which gave Spain the right to colonize a good portion of the New World while leaving Portugal with just Brazil) a driving force in the design. It's an approach that redefines historical gaming.

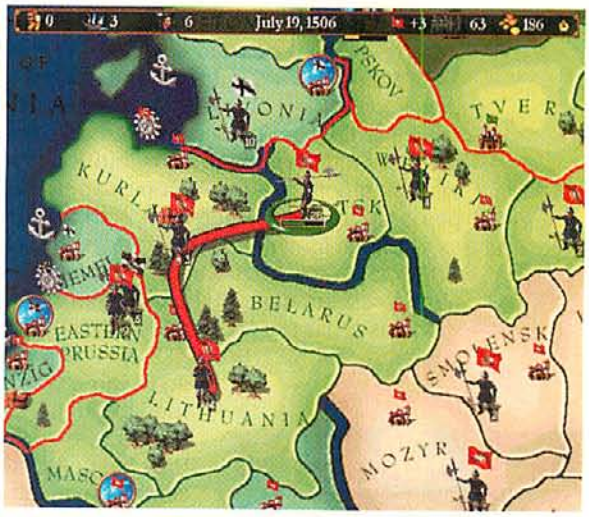
EUROPA UNIVERSALIS

reviewed by Bruce Geryk

A port of an elegant—if obscure and complicated—board game, EUROPA UNIVERSALIS' basic design remains essentially unchanged. The one major element made possible by the computer format is the switch to a real-time mode that actually enhances gameplay. Instead of having to hit the "next turn" button repeatedly, the variable speed and ability to order while the game is paused allow players to control the game's pace. And they'll need that ability: The grand campaign scenario spans 300 game years and will take at least 60 hours to complete. And there are 10 very different nations to play. Eleven shorter scenarios are available as well.

The most striking elements of EUROPA UNIVERSALIS involve what you can't do. You can't just attack anyone you want, since declarations of war can trigger extreme unrest in your nation unless you have a good reason to attack. You'll need a *casus belli* (Latin for "occasion for war"). You also can't explore the world at will—only explorers and conquistadors can reliably map uncharted territory. These and many other restrictions on war, peace, and trade mean that certain ahistorical courses (such as a massive Russian colonization of the Americas) are precluded.

That's not to say that the game is a mere historical re-creation. EUROPA UNIVERSALIS actually gives players an idea of the factors that guided a nation's development. Building troops, arranging royal marriages, investing in infrastructure, and competing for trade will introduce enough variety that no one will confuse the game with a history exam.



IT'S A LONG, LONG WAY TO YARUGUAY The map is based on provinces, with the Americas, Africa, and the Far East awaiting discovery.

While there are numerous variables that affect gameplay, the game manages to remain largely free of micromanagement. This is because it does a good job of making the macro issues involved in managing your country fit the game's scale. Most decisions are easy to effect yet take some time to implement, meaning that once you make a decision to do something, it'll be some time before you need to follow it up.

The idiosyncratic approach to gaming in EUROPA UNIVERSALIS extends to the manual. Written more as a commentary on history in game terms rather than as a description of how to actually play the game, it makes finding critical information at a glance almost impossible. Instead, gamers should find a cozy corner and curl up for a few hours. It won't take any longer than playing the tutorial.

EUROPA UNIVERSALIS is not quite an empire builder, but it's much more than just an interactive history book. While some gamers will undoubtedly chafe at the restraints that prevent them from rewriting European history from scratch, this essential element is what makes the game so engrossing. By limiting your control, the designers have turned the limitations of the board game into a truly fresh approach to computer gaming. It's a novel game experience that—like historical understanding—demands some time investment. It's worth it. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
History has never been this much fun.

CONS
Annoying interface and manual; an AI that's weaker than Henry VI.

Requirements: Pentium 200, 64MB RAM, 180MB hard drive space, 2MB video RAM. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300, 128MB RAM. **3D Support:** None **Multiplayer:** Direct TCP/IP (2-8 players), LAN; only the host needs CD.

Publisher: Strategy First • Developer: Paradox Entertainment • $50 • www.strategyfirst.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

Scanners indicate little life on this *Star Trek* title

Simply Red

STAR TREK: AWAY TEAM

reviewed by Alex Handy

If I may wax *Simpsons* Comic Book Guy for a moment: "AWAY TEAM is the worst episode *ever*." This is not to say that the gameplay is the worst ever (STAR TREK: NEW WORLDS holds that distinction), but it's still not a shining example of good *Trek* gaming. STAR TREK: AWAY TEAM is a classic case of yet another *Star Trek* game yet again featuring the ubiquitous game versions of Data and Worf in a convoluted story that plays out yet again like a bad *Trek* novel. There are just too many plot devices: Borg, Romulans, Klingons, mutagenic virii, conspiracy within the federation's ranks—even some sort of bizarre neural-net-like device for Data to analyze and admire. God knows, we've all been here before.

After STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE, all other *Trek* games—especially Activision's—have a higher power to answer to. You might think a direct comparison to ELITE FORCE is not apt here; after all, AWAY TEAM is a real-time, squad-based, tactical combat game; ELITE FORCE is a first-person shooter. But ELITE FORCE proved that *Trek* games have a vital need for the tight, well-scripted feel of an episode, or at the very least, a movie. AWAY TEAM simply feels like a tactical combat game with a transparent *Trek* overlay on top of it, and a few Borg added for zest.

This would be a forgivable offense were the gameplay better. While there is definitely an audience for AWAY TEAM's gameplay, it's done better elsewhere. FALLOUT TACTICS, for example, manages to bring riveting gameplay to the table, along with an equally excellent story. Were FALLOUT TACTICS not around, however, this game would still be bland and flat.

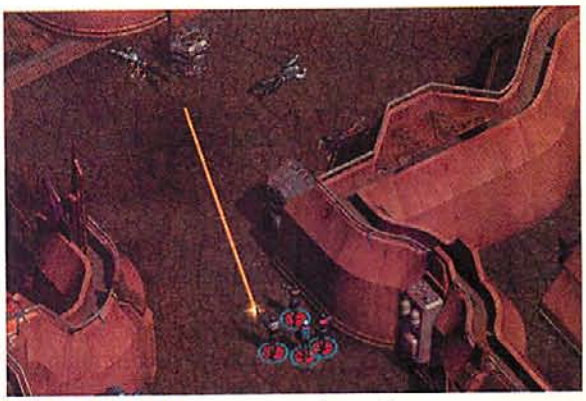
AWAY TEAM is decidedly COMMANDOS-flavored. While the game is many times easier than COMMANDOS, most of the tools and characters in COMMANDOS have parallels in AWAY TEAM. There's a personal cloaking device, a holographic appearance manipulator, and a transporter brig that is basically an elaborate way to dispose of bodies. Like that other game, AWAY TEAM has none of the role-playing or character-building elements that give FALLOUT TACTICS or even X-COM their richer flavor. Every character is simply a tool for solving puzzles and plodding through waypoints in the attractive 2D environments.



SOUND OF SILENCE Those blue lines represent how far your sound travels. It's a nice touch and makes sneaking much easier.

But it's not all bad. One of the few things AWAY TEAM has that few other tactical squad-based games has is good pacing. This is perhaps, if I may quote Bill and Ted, the most excellent and bodacious achievement of AWAY TEAM. While the story pretty much sucks, it does unfold in a near perfect lock step which is hard to fall out of, no matter how badly you screw up. No matter how bored you are with the lackluster and repetitive gameplay, at least you can be assured that you're making good progress towards the end of the game.

So while Data and Worf put in some admirable voiceovers, they're not enough to make this game feel like an honest-to-god piece of the *Star Trek* universe. If you really need a squad-based tactical game, get FALLOUT TACTICS. If you can't live without your *Trek*, get ELITE FORCE or DEEP SPACE NINE: THE FALLEN. But if you're dying for a *Star Trek* game that lets you have a bunch of guys run around, scan, and shoot, well, this one's for you. CGW



CRATE AND BARREL Time to crate: 0 seconds.

CGW RATED

PROS
Simple to play.

CONS
There's no there there.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266, 64MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Same **3D Support:** None
Multiplayer: LAN (2 players).

Publisher: Activision • Developer: Reflexive Entertainment Inc. • $50 • www.activision.com • ESRB Rating: Teen

Finally, a fantasy-themed hack & slash for the whole gang!

Uncontrollable Bleeding

I don't know about you, but if I'm creeping around some dank, filthy dungeon teeming with giant spiders and other gruesome creatures worthy of a Dio album cover and I break open a crate with some meat or cheese inside, I'm not eating it. Same thing goes for that turkey leg over there in that pool of blood next to the severed head.

BLADE OF DARKNESS is one seriously gory dungeon-crawl. Limbs, heads, and entire torsos are cleaved and hewed with such panache that you can't help but want to pick up the nearest orc skull to drink the crimson dregs inside and scream out in primal rage, "I am a golden god of destruction!" (Put that in your pipe and smoke it, Joe Lieberman.)



CAP PEELED BACK Multiplayer showdowns are a real hoot; just don't lose your head (sorry).

BLADE OF DARKNESS
reviewed by Tom Price

Shine Your Light on the Underworld

But those who dismiss BLADE OF DARKNESS as too bloody or carnage-fueled will miss the game's finer points. And surprisingly, there are many. Codemasters' Spanish developer, Rebel Act Studios, brings us one of the more unexpectedly enjoyable third-person action games in quite a while.

What you'll notice first about BLADE OF DARKNESS is an impressive graphics engine that boasts highly advanced, realistic lighting. Sounds unimportant, but think about what individual light sources and the resulting realistic shadows mean. The first time you detect an enemy lurking around a corner because the campfire he's roasting marshmallows over casts his flickering shadow across the wall, you'll understand. The inherent creepy dankness of the dungeons, caves, and other doom-filled rooms is greatly enhanced by the technology, and it provides the gamer with a fairly immersive environment. Of course, due credit should go to the level designers, who did an admirable job creating a fantastical yet familiar world.

CGW RATED

PROS
Atmosphere is perfectly realized, thanks to awesome lighting engine.

CONS
Control, control, control.

Bust a Move

But as with any third-person action game, ease of control ultimately makes or breaks the experience. Sadly, BLADE OF DARKNESS' frustratingly sluggish control nearly sinks the game. The basic elements of movement work well enough; just running around rarely poses a problem. But when you're in the middle of a fight, especially against multiple opponents, orienting yourself properly or choosing the right weapon become matters of life and death. Well, mostly death.

That's not to say that the fighting engine is bad. In fact, it's a lot of fun, with multiple weapons of varying classes, from axes to two-handed swords to spears. You can even use a bow and arrow, but it's really only useful for long-range sniping. Shields are another important item, and a good fight will always involve ample use of them, along with other defensive tactics like dodging. Considering the huge number of enemies in the game, the bevy of weapons, and all the special moves that can be unlocked as the player levels up, fights in BOD almost never get old. But man do they get hard.

Two of the features we usually grouse about being absent are miraculously present in this game: in-level saves and multiplayer. Multiplayer, or Arena mode, lets up to eight players engage in a combat free-for-all, but a little one-on-one action is usually more fun.

The Holy Grail

The question remains: Is BLADE OF DARKNESS worth it? When you consider that you have four distinct characters, with their own fighting styles and attributes to choose from (I recommend playing the game as the Amazon first), a cool multiplayer mode, and a single-player campaign that should keep you busy for many, many hours—then absolutely. Sure, it has control issues, and yes, it's extremely difficult in the later levels, but it's still a visual treat and should please any fantasy fan used to a world full of dwarves and minotaurs and the undead.

If BLADE OF DARKNESS were a piece of meat lying next to a pile of bones in a deep underground tomb, I'd eat it. CGW

Requirements: Pentium-II 400, 64MB RAM, 750MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III 500, 128MB RAM.
3D Support: D3D **Multiplayer:** IPX or TCP/IP Network (2–8 players).

Publisher: Codemasters • Developer: Rebel Act Studios • $30 • www.codemastersusa.com/blade/ • ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood, gore, and violence.

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The sequel to EARTH 2150 delivers the same stuff all over again

Nothing New on the Moon

Although Topware Interactive's THE MOON PROJECT is billed—and priced—as a sequel to EARTH 2150, it's a pretty poor excuse for a sequel. In fact, it hardly qualifies as an expansion pack. The best and most unlikely audience for this game is people who haven't played EARTH 2150; they alone won't feel ripped off by how little has changed in the nine months since Topware was selling essentially the same stuff in a different box.

What's new in THE MOON PROJECT? Not much. Although it boasts "an enhanced version" of the EARTH 2150 engine, all its vaunted features were present in the previous game: Terrain deformation! Real-time lighting! Particle effects! Very attractive, to be sure, but also very familiar to those of us who enjoyed EARTH 2150. The only apparent difference is that the camera zooms out farther (with the requisite frame-rate hit). THE MOON PROJECT is so enhanced that it loads EARTH 2150's maps without a hitch.

THE MOON PROJECT
reviewed by Tom Chick

The most conspicuous new element is a new campaign for each of the three sides. Since resources are strictly limited, you'll have to reload the game if you take too many losses. The missions still rely heavily on puzzle solutions, complete with cheesy RED ALERT–style power-ups. The headquarters that tie the missions together now feature recyclers (also a welcome addition to the skirmish games). This means you can rebuild your forces if you want to try a different approach for a particular mission. And unlike in EARTH 2150, you don't have to sock away a certain amount of money to win, so you won't paint yourself into a corner late in the campaign.

Although there are new toys for each of the sides, they're most often things that were already present in EARTH 2150. The United Civilized States (UCS) can now build the Eurasian Dynasty's heavy cannons, the Lunar Corporation gets a power plant and a tunnel digger like everyone else, the Eurasian Dynasty (ED) gets a stealth unit, and so on.

Many of the completely new technologies are of questionable value. Earthquake generators are pretty weak, although they can be used from a position of impunity by tunneling under your enemy's base. The new submarines rarely come into play since the unit balance and map design tend to downplay naval forces.



QUAKE, RATTLE, AND ROLL Earthquake generators attack from underground tunnels, which are displayed with a green map overlay. Chaos, as you'd imagine, ensues.

The best new technology is artillery, which is given to all three sides. Artillery can break late-game stalemates by attacking from outside a base's defensive range. However, it undermines the long-range advantage of the ED's ballistic missiles and the UCS's plasma cannons. Since artillery is at the end of the research branch for rockets, this further encourages their use over other weapons. However, rockets are mildly countered with antirocket point defenses that can be built on structures.

Two glaring problems with EARTH 2150 that are in no way addressed in THE MOON PROJECT are the awful manual and the lack of balance among the sides. THE MOON PROJECT's manual is basically just a reprint of the EARTH 2150 manual, stuffed with filler and still lacking important information about gameplay. And there has been absolutely no effort whatsoever to balance the Lunar Corporation's insane production advantage over the other two sides. The Lunar Corporation is now even stronger with the formidable Fat Girl chassis, the ability to dig tunnels, a fast scout that can regenerate damage, and long-range artillery attacks.

Did it not occur to anyone to playtest this game for balance?

Let me make it perfectly clear that EARTH 2150 is a great game and one of last year's best RTS titles. By the same token, THE MOON PROJECT is also great. It's just a shame that the publishers insist on calling it a whole new game when this is the sort of stuff many companies offer in a patch. At best, THE MOON PROJECT is little more than a full-price gold version of EARTH 2150. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
As good as EARTH 2150.

CONS
No better than and not much different from EARTH 2150.

Requirements: Pentium-II 200, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space, 3D accelerator with 4MB. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III 450, 64MB RAM, 800MB hard drive, 3D accelerator with 16MB. **3D Support:** Direct 3D, OpenGL, Glide. **Multiplayer:** EarthNet, MSN Gaming Zone, DirectPlay (TCP/IP or IPX).

Publisher: GAME Studios • Developer: Topware Interactive • $50 • www.ssionline.com • ESRB Rating: Teen

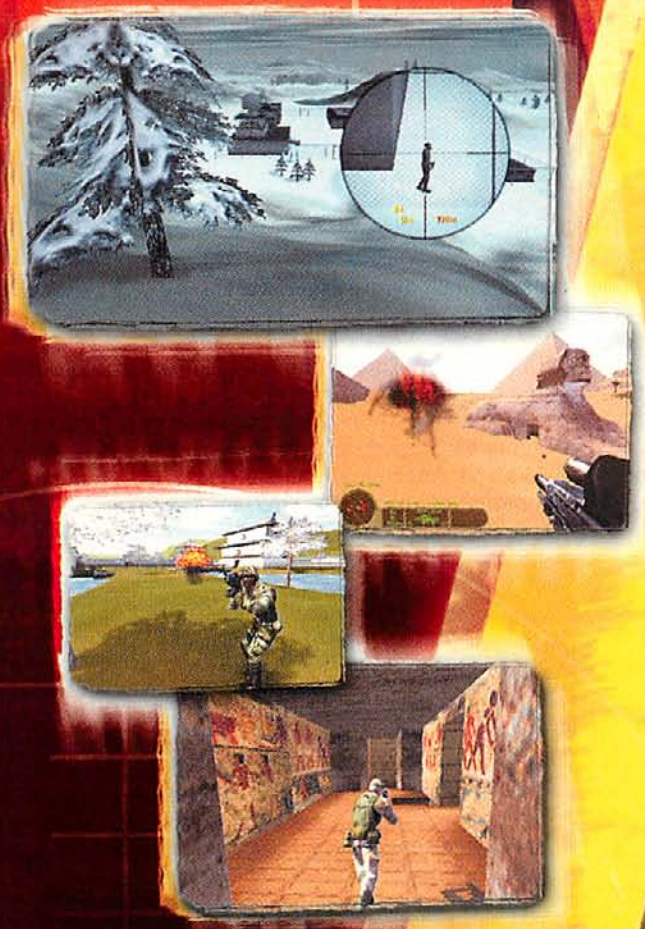
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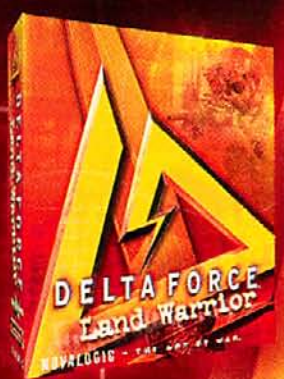
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The stately lines of AGE OF SAIL II mask an ugly reality just underneath

Ship of Fools

AGE OF SAIL II

reviewed by Johnny L. Wilson

For history fans who want to relive the glory of booming cannon battles and proud fighting ships, AGE OF SAIL II is a dream come true. The game puts you on the quarterdeck of the most famous warships in history, in gorgeous 3D detail. Gunwales splinter and masts collapse on-deck. Smoke billows up after cannon fire and dissipates with the wind. Fires break out ondeck and must be extinguished. The ship models are beautiful. The scenarios are well crafted, and the campaigns are progressively challenging.

Captains will have their hands full choosing between chain shot (designed to take out sails, rigging, and masts), grape shot (for churning enemy crews into sausage), round shot (longest range and most typical), and double round shot (optimal for close-range slug fests). Crews can be assigned to man the guns, repair the masts and rigging, put out fires, or board enemy ships. Commodores and admirals choose from standard formations or create their own. And the musical score almost rivals a John Williams sound track.

Unfortunately, as worthy of commendation in the Naval Gazette as AOS2 may be, it has a dreadful tendency to engage in conduct unbecoming an officer. System lockups, illogical auto-fire, ships stuck on invisible reefs, and AI that tends to run aground are only a few of the game's annoying habits. A patch from TalonSoft's website ameliorates the catatonic AI in the shipped game, but the other problems remain.

Anyone looking for a "simulation" will be very disappointed. This is a tactical wargame. Unlike the historical vessels, the models in AOS2 do not get "caught in irons" when they face fully into the wind. Worse, each ship's helm will automatically take the shortest path along the compass when you change course, even if it illogically takes you "through the wind" instead of forcing you to sail realistically. The campaigns are not dynamic. They are relatively static in that success or failure affects only your prestige, money, and ship quality. It doesn't really change the campaign missions.

AGE OF SAIL II comes closer than any other game to simulating tactical naval warfare in the 18th and 19th centuries. Those who love that era would be doing themselves a disservice to miss it. Those who lack patience with nagging bugs and unrealistic design decisions should steer clear of it. In short, AOS2 isn't a decorated admiral, but it is certainly a competent commodore. CGW

CGW RATED

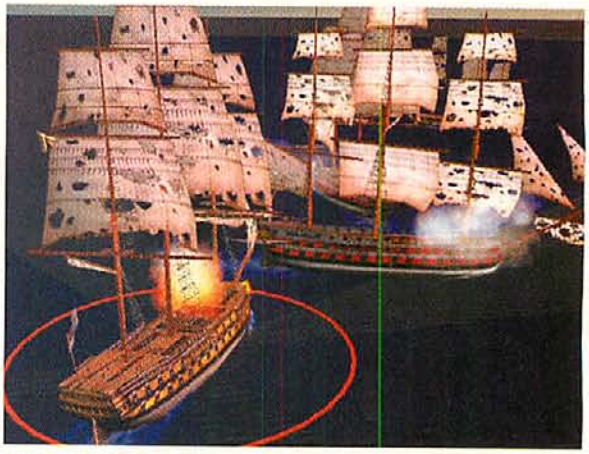


PROS

Great graphics; brilliant musical score; additional online scenarios; plenty of period flavor and historical notes.

CONS

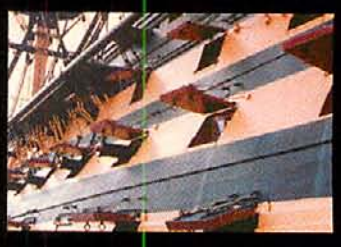
Unrealistic ship handling; occasional bugs; poor AI; no dynamic campaign.



CROSSING THE T The Intrepid catches fire after getting raked by a broadside.

Visiting the Victory

I've read dozens of novels and played dozens of games from the age of fighting sail, but nothing could prepare me for standing on the deck of the HMS *Victory* where Horatio Nelson was shot during the Battle of Trafalgar. I stood in the cabin where the Admiral gave his commands, and lingered below decks where he died. I stood in the cramped quarters of the gun deck and imagined the gun ports blasted into splinters by enemy round shot. I was haunted by the idea of these monstrous cannon rolling back against their constraints as crouching men maneuvered in smoke-choked quarters to swab out the barrels, reload, and roll the guns back to fire again. After visiting the *Victory*, I could never again imagine naval engagements without considering the cost of "victory." The vessels were graceful. The battles were brutal. The price was high.



THE HMS VICTORY had 104 guns, including 30 32-pounders that could penetrate two feet of oak at a range of one mile.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266, 64MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space, 8X CD-ROM, 16MB 3D card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 450, 128MB RAM. **3D Support:** D3D **Multiplayer:** LAN, Internet (2–16 players).

Publisher: TalonSoft • Developer: Akella • $40 • www.talonsoft.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone; realistic violence.

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There's no contest in this battle of business sims

Bill Gates Versus Gilligan

INDUSTRY GIANT/THE CORPORATE MACHINE

reviewed by Jeff Lackey

At first glance, JoWood's INDUSTRY GIANT and Stardock Entertainment's THE CORPORATE MACHINE appear to have quite a bit in common. Both games seem to offer plentiful options. Both could also benefit from better documentation and refinements in the interface. Once you dig into the games, however, you realize that they're as similar as a Porsche and a Yugo—yeah, they both have wheels, engines, and seats, but you'll want to spend serious time in only one of them.

Clues to the differences appear early. INDUSTRY GIANT advises upgrading to DirectX 3, warns that running at higher than 256 colors may result in poor performance, and asks whether you have a 486 or Pentium (I) processor. Huh? You haven't stepped into the *Twilight Zone*: This is a rerelease, with nary a single upgrade or enhancement, of a game first published in Europe in 1997, then released in the U.S. in 1998.



THE BIG CITY If INDUSTRY GIANT reminds you of three-year-old SIMCITY-type games, it's because the graphics *are* three years old.

THE CORPORATE MACHINE, in contrast, is the successor to the wonderful ENTREPRENEUR, with a full slate of new features and enhancements, many of them based on customer feedback. And while not a single pixel of INDUSTRY GIANT has changed since it was on the shelves in 1998, Stardock has already released enhancements for THE CORPORATE MACHINE (a new market, new maps, and an upgrade that enhances the already superb AI.)

Next, contrast the depth of each game. INDUSTRY GIANT appears to offer options galore, but after playing the scenarios and a career or two, you realize that every game plays the same: Build production sites, put a store next to your opponent's, run rail lines for logistics (every other form of transport is inferior), cut prices, and sit back and watch. That's about it, with some window dressing to differentiate the scenarios. Worse still, the AI opponents are the business equivalents of Larry, Curly, and Moe, blundering around like headless chickens. Internet play is not included, so there's no relief from the dullard computer adversaries.

The inverse of this experience is playing THE CORPORATE MACHINE. Actually a wargame set in the cutthroat world of business, it has you making decisions such as which market to enter (computers, autos, aircraft, or colas), whether to focus on making your product technically superior or merely average but with superior marketing, which dirty tricks to pull on your unsuspecting competition, and much more. Then the world falls down around your ears. Your opponents trump your dirty tricks, steal your customers, and generally beat you like a drum. And they do so in a way that makes you smile, rub your hands together, and plan a new strategy for "just one more game," realizing that the strategic options are deep and varied, and that there are many routes to victory and many more to defeat. And if getting your butt kicked by the stellar computer AI is not enough, a simple and effective Internet multiplayer mode ensures that human foes are available at the click of a button.



TAKE NO PRISONERS THE CORPORATE MACHINE allows you to play dirty tricks on your opponents, such as inciting strikes.

Striving for world dominance in business is tough. Choosing between these two games is not. CGW

INDUSTRY GIANT

CGW RATED

PROS

AI opponents are clueless enough that your small children may enjoy beating up on them.

CONS

It's the exact same game that was only average when it was released three years ago.

Publisher: Macmillan USA • Developer: JoWood • www.jowood.com
ESRB Rating: Everyone

CORPORATE MACHINE

CGW RATED

PROS

A witty, deep, and thoroughly enjoyable business game with cutthroat AI.

CONS

Spotty manual and a lack of some player aids needlessly increase the learning curve.

Publisher: Stardock Entertainment • Developer: Stardock Entertainment • www.stardock.com
ESRB Rating: Everyone



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NBA LIVE 2001



This year's version of EA Sports' big basketball opus is unequivocally the most realistic yet. The real-life NBA—with the possible exception of the Sacramento Kings—embraces a slow-paced, defensively oriented game plan with no running game. So does NBA LIVE. In the NBA, teams milk the 24-second clock and move the ball around less than a high school all-star team. NBA LIVE inevitably devolves into the same patterns. Dribble the ball for hours before passing it into the post, at which point your big guys will make like Chuck Barkley and spend 18 seconds backing down for their shot. It's impossible to drive the lane in this game, or do any fast-breaking whatsoever—even at the Arcade setting.

The biggest crime, however, is that NBA LIVE remains largely unimproved from last year's game. In fact, the gameplay seems worse. Rebounding, which we complained about last year, attains new levels of frustration this year. It's so difficult for humans and the computer to snatch defensive boards that on offense you can actually incorporate intentionally missed free throws into an effective game plan.

And then there's the weird, dead time-lag between button presses that has never existed in the series' seven-year history. Too often you'll drive a player into a wide-open lane, press the shoot button, and...nothing happens. The player doesn't shoot, the defense collapses on him, and your easy bucket vaporizes into thin air. Or comes back into your face. In NBA LIVE 2001, you have to pause for the slightest microsecond before you shoot, or the button press won't register.

★★★☆☆

By no means is NBA LIVE 2001 putrid. In fact, it's slightly above average. But it's definitely a step backward and an embarrassment for this fabled franchise. You can salvage some fun out of it by staging a custom league with a draft using the great teams (the '50s through the '90s) in the game. A Jerry West/Michael Jordan-led starting five is always a beautiful thing. —*George Jones*

Genre: Sports • **Publisher:** EA Sports • **Developer:** EA Sports • $20 • www.easports.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

TRIPLE PLAY BASEBALL

Genre: Sports • **Publisher:** EA Sports • **Developer:** Trey Arch • $45 • www.easports.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

What is the point of repeatedly attempting to pick off a runner on first base with the bases loaded? Why would you waste an out in the bottom of the ninth by sacrificing a runner into scoring position, when you're down two runs? For that matter, why would you make a well-hit ball sound like cannon fire, when the crack of a wooden bat solidly connecting with a baseball remains one of the most amazing sound effects in sports?

★½☆☆☆

The more you play EA's latest version of TRIPLE PLAY BASEBALL, the more questions like these form in your head. It's all quite puzzling, but what can you expect of a game that tries to combine a serious approach with the sort of extreme, oddball elements you'd expect to find in the XFL? Even more puzzling is why a supposedly extreme game generates statistical results and performances consistent with real life. Sure, extreme and oddball don't necessarily mean bad. Sloppy controls, insipid AI, a square baseball, an awkward interface, and the need to repeatedly mash a button to accelerate your runners—those things mean bad. The end result of such schizophrenic design is a game that's simply no good. It's not worth probing the game's myriad inconsistencies, but we do have one other burning question: Why would anyone buy TRIPLE PLAY when HIGH HEAT 2002 does everything better? —*George Jones*

STAR WARS: BATTLE FOR NABOO

A port from the Nintendo 64 game of the same name, BATTLE FOR NABOO had me mesmerized by the old-school nature of LucasArts' latest *Star Wars* endeavor. The ships look chintzy, the textures are blocky, and the AI is dumber than a UPN sitcom.

★★★☆☆

But the throwback nature of the game isn't entirely a bad thing. Poor graphics aside, NABOO is mighty fun at times—in a GALAGA, coin-op kind of way. Lately, PC game developers appear to have forgotten about one enjoyable aspect of gaming: all-out fun with no thinking whatsoever. NABOO marks a return to that, with a basic premise of "destroy everything you see, and then do it again."

Appropriately, you even get three lives instead of the ability to save your game, meaning that if you die, you have to restart your current level. When's the last time you saw that in a PC game?

On the downside, the game's attempted diversity and pacing—you fight in space and on land, in seven different vehicles—rings a little hollow, particularly since your freedom of movement is limited.

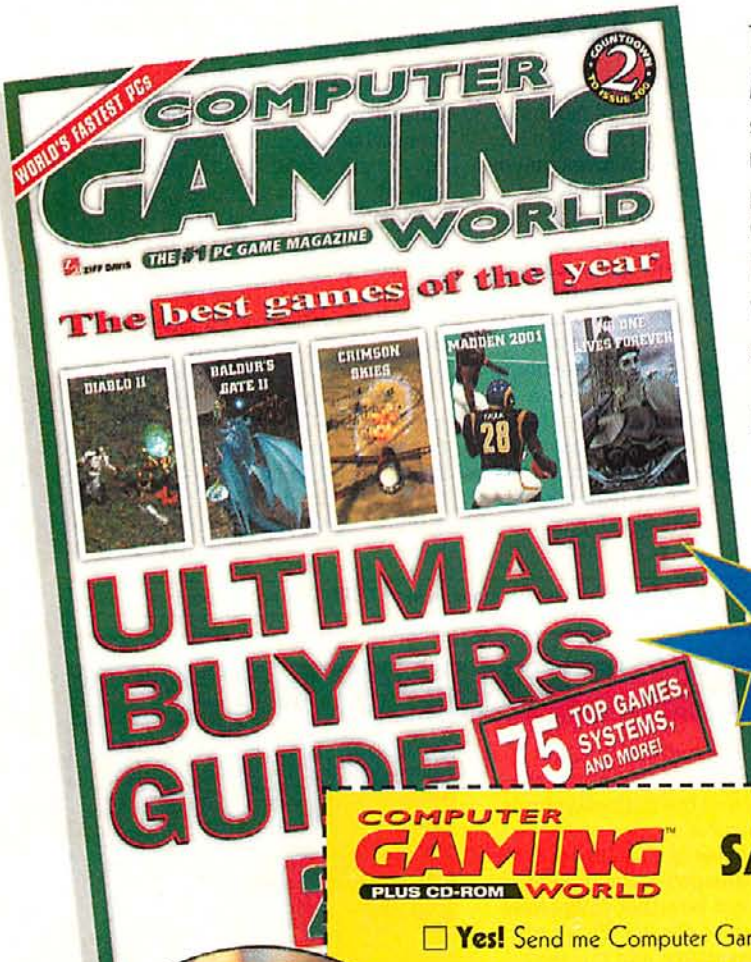
But like I said, it's a Nintendo 64 port. Ah, why am I wasting my breath? If LucasArts or Factor 5 had decided to bolster NABOO's graphics and AI instead of maximizing their profit margins, you'd be all over this game. Too bad they didn't. —*George Jones*



Genre: Action • **Publisher:** LucasArts • **Developer:** Factor 5 • $45 • www.lucasarts.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated violence.

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STARPEACE: RISE OF THE TYCOONS

The barbarians are at the gate, but in STARPEACE: RISE OF THE TYCOONS they aren't bearing clubs and cudgels, but charts and spreadsheets. And so massively multiplayer online gaming moves from the age of elves and dragons to zoning restrictions and industry building.

Set in a science fiction, SIMCITY-style setting, STARPEACE focuses on economics. You are staked with money and placed on a newly colonized alien planet. Your job is to build a commercial empire and reach Legend status.

Not surprisingly, this is an amazingly complex game with over 300 structures to build and hundreds of things to research. You start by deciding where you want to build your fledgling empire; then purchase land and construct buildings, make roads, and engage in research. Unlike SIMCITY—where you're solely responsible for an entire city—here you play alongside other humans, which adds some interesting tension. A player may decide to specialize in pharmaceuticals. Do you want to compete—building drug research facilities, factories, drug stores, and even engage in a price war—or do you want to specialize in another industry?



You'll have more to worry about. An attractive piece of land may be gobbled up by a rival player. You'll need to build housing to attract workers. To increase their happiness, you may have to consider raising their wages. There are literally hundreds of factors to fiddle with. A player can even be elected mayor, which gives him or her powers to rezone business districts. And, of course, players can also oust the current mayor.

While I had many fascinating moments with the game, they were offset by bugs and puzzling design decisions—problems severe enough for the publisher to decide to give players an extra month of free service. There have been frequent server resets, severe lag problems, lots of server disconnects, a nasty road bug that more or less halts development, and more. Then there are some curious design decisions, like the somewhat draconian power that a mayor can wield. On one world in one city, a mayor rezoned key areas and more or less thwarted all but he and his allies from building for a week and a half of real-world time. People don't pay *not* to play these games, but due to the machinations of devious players, this is exactly what happened.

There's some interesting aspects, but Oceanus hasn't quite finished putting the roof on STAR PEACE. And sometimes—particularly in persistent online games—it rains. *—Mark Asher*

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** Monte Cristo • **Developer:** Oceanus • $39 • www.starpeace.net • **ESRB Rating:** Unrated

WORMS WORLD PARTY

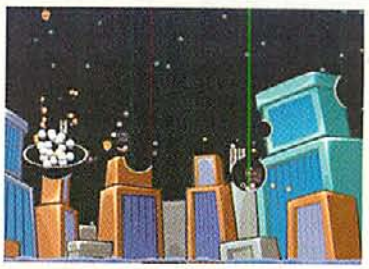
"It's just SCORCHED EARTH with Disney-ish characters. What the hell is the big deal?"

This is one of those days where I find myself dining on a heaping plate of crow. But enough about my latest faux pas, WORMS WORLD PARTY is pretty good.

The WORMS franchise core gameplay of having zesty little worms lob weapons at each other, with strategic factors such as "wind" and "positioning," hasn't changed. Why futz with a solid formula? Like the previous title, there's single-player, deathmatch, training, and multiplayer maps.

There aren't that many new weapons, but two changes to multiplayer justify the rating: the WormPot, and the multiplayer missions. WormPot applies up to three variables (e.g., "higher weapon damage") in a multiplayer match; it can be either completely randomized or chosen. This adds a lot of replayability, and this way the maps don't feel stale.

The multiplayer missions are just like scenarios you'd find in an action game: Each player has an objective, whether it's to grab a certain crate, or to be the last one standing when the meteors come hurtling down. There're even some co-op missions, where both players try to either kill, or save, an AI. WormPot makes vanilla deathmatches pretty fun, but the missions push the multiplayer aspect even further.



Playing the game in huddled solitude isn't quite as thrilling. The single-player missions and deathmatches pale in comparison to the multiplayer experience. Newbies and heavy multiplayer fans have a compelling reason to check this package out. Solitary gamers who already have ARMAGEDDON might want to reconsider. *—Thierry Nguyen*

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** Titus Games • **Developer:** Team17 • $25 • www.team17.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone; animated violence, mild language.

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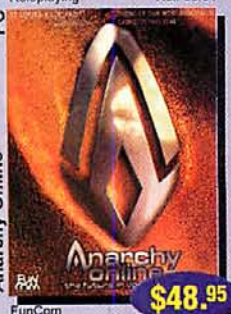

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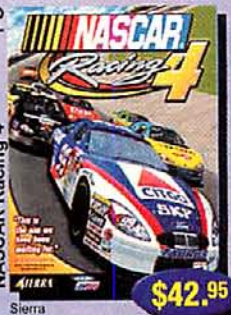
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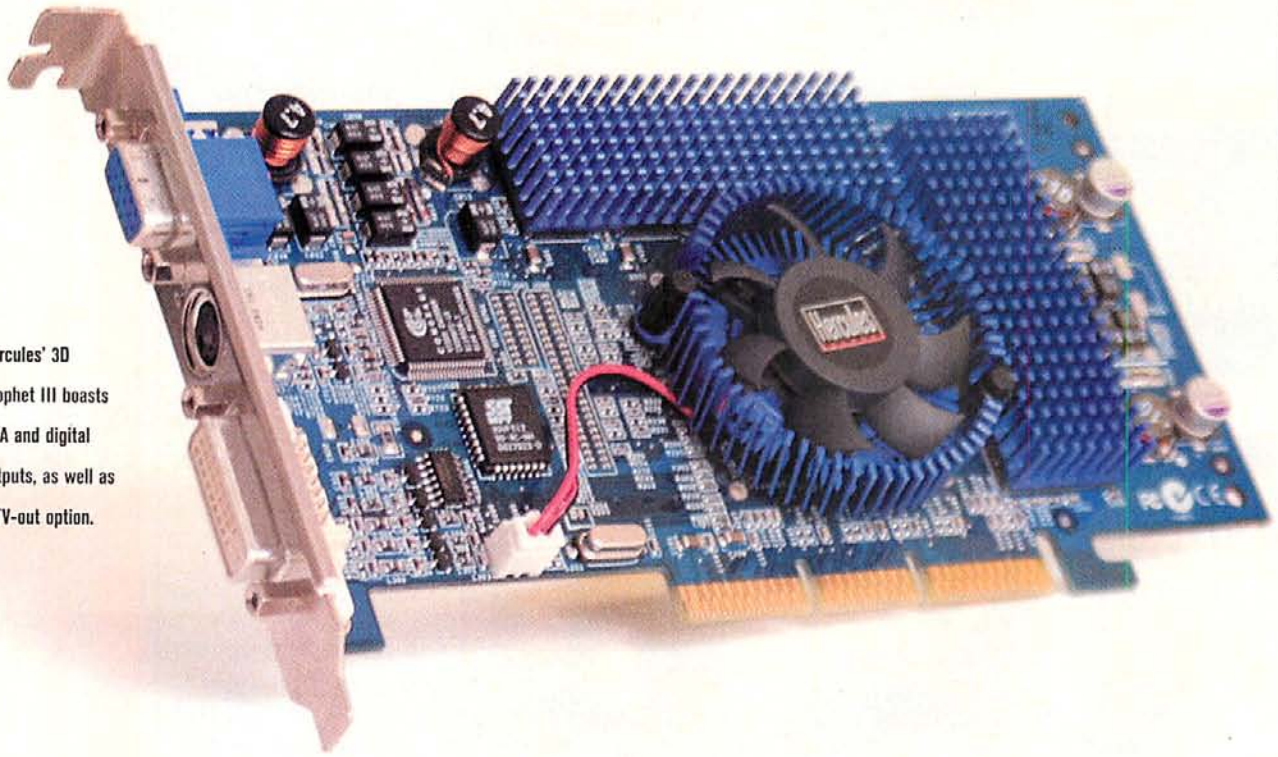
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Hercules' 3D Prophet III boasts VGA and digital outputs, as well as a TV-out option.

GeForce3 redefines consumer 3D -- but at a price by Loyd Case

More than anything else, Nvidia's latest GPU, the GeForce3, offers an amazing glimpse at the capabilities of DirectX 8.0.

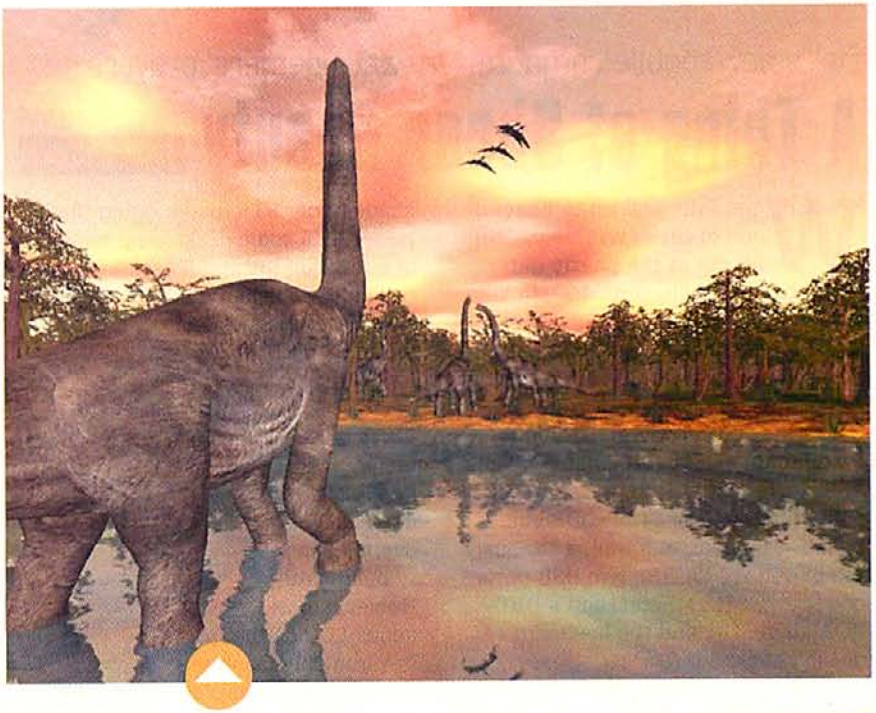
The first of a new breed of programmable GPUs (graphics processing unit), the GeForce 3 supports DirectX 8-style programmable pixel and vertex shaders. This means that game developers will now have unprecedented control over how their games will look. In the past, programmers either had to write their own software-based transform and lighting engines, or use the fixed function T&L engines built into the current generation of Nvidia and ATI GPUs. Now, they can customize the look of their game engines and still have the benefits of higher polygon counts. As these screen shots from Mad Onion's 3Dmark 2001 indicate, the graphics potential of the GeForce3 boggles the mind.

But all this new functionality comes at a steep price. The GeForce3 needs 57 million transistors to work its magic—and this huge transistor count results in a big chip that runs at a slower clock-rate than its predecessor, the GeForce2 Ultra. In fact, Nvidia even specs the maximum triangle throughput at a lower number than the GeForce2 Ultra. But the GeForce3 makes up for these limitations through significant improvements in its memory architecture, dubbed "Lightspeed Memory Architecture." Early z-rejection (throwing away polygons that don't need to be rendered) and more efficient memory accesses and multisampling (for anti-aliasing) result in better overall memory bandwidth. Despite the lower clock-rate, early benchmarks show the GeForce3 to be somewhat faster than the GeForce2 Ultra...in today's games.

But the real potential of the chip won't be unlocked until DirectX 8—or OpenGL games using Nvidia's programmable shader extensions—ship. In the past, developers have been slow to accept new features, but two factors will alter this equation. First, giving developers control over their graphics pipeline is a seductive pitch. Secondly, Microsoft's Xbox game console will use the same technology, giving developers a potentially huge market for titles using these advanced features. Even now, a few current titles, such as Planet Moon's GIANTS, are being rearchitected using the new features.

One potential monkey wrench in all this graphics goodness is price. Even the cheapest GeForce3 available comes in at nearly $500. Brand name boards list at over $500. Creative Labs has bowed out of the GeForce3 race, prefering to wait until the technology becomes cheaper.

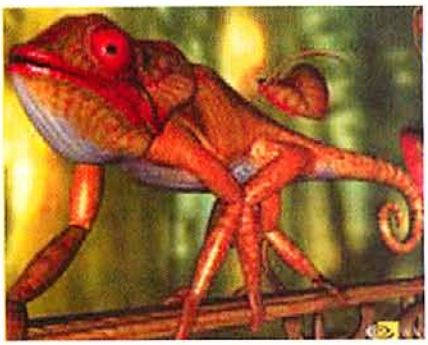
So really, it's between you and your wallet. On the one hand, you can have the fastest board on the block, and have playable anti-aliasing to boot. But there will be few games using the advanced features of the GeForce3 this year. Given Nvidia's track record of cost-reducing its technology over time, a wait-and-see attitude may be the wisest one—though not necessarily the most fun. CGW



GeForce3's reflective bump mapping as applied to Crytek Studios' X-ISLE: DINOSAUR ISLAND.



With nVidia's high-resolution anti-aliasing (HRAA), scenes like this one from Grin's BALLISTIC won't have the "jaggies" that are common with lesser GPUs.





The GeForce3's nfiniteFX engine makes Voltar's face look more realistic—replete with facial hairs and blemishes.



>>> Industry Bytes

Sony Changes Direction

In a move that has everyone in the gaming industry scratching their collective heads, Sony recently acquired Connectix Corporation, maker of the now infamous Virtual Game Station PlayStation emulator. For years now, Connectix and Sony have been at loggerheads over the legality of the PlayStation emulator. With the acquisition, Sony now owns all core assets related to the Virtual Game Station. Rumor has it that the purchase will enable Sony to build PlayStation emulators for all kinds of other hardware devices.

1GHz To Go!

Mobile gamers rejoice! Intel recently announced that laptops boasting its 1GHz Pentium III chipset are now available. While it was expected that AMD would

spotlight review

Dell's new mobile computer answers gamers' prayers

A Thing of Sheer Beauty



When I die and go to heaven, one of these will be waiting for me at the pearly gates. Okay, so it's not elegant and thin, like Apple's Titanium laptop. But what it lacks in elegance, it makes up for in sheer horsepower and features. Listing the features would take pages, but here's the short list: a 1GHz mobile Pentium III, a 1600x1200 native resolution active matrix LCD, a GeForce2Go GPU with 32MB of 64-bit DDR video memory, modem, ethernet, a seriously big hard drive (30GB), two USB ports, one firewire (1394) port, and a DVD-ROM drive. Oh, and the keyboard doesn't suck.

Before we dive into performance numbers, let's consider the display for a moment. Dell crams nearly 2 million pixels into a 15-inch LCD—it's called "Ultra XGA". The native resolution is 1600x1200. Interestingly, 1600x1200 is four times 800x600 (2x in horizontal and vertical directions). One of the problems with LCD displays is the relatively poor quality of the image at resolutions lower than the native resolution of the LCD. But 800x600 on the Inspiron looks, well, inspired. The filtering at exactly half the pixel count in each direction works beautifully. By contrast, 1024x768 doesn't look as good as 800x600. For games that overpower the GeForce2Go at 1600x1200, 800x600 makes for a superb second choice.

The performance of the Inspiron in games is vastly better than anything we've yet seen in a laptop. The GameGauge 2.0 score comes in at a shade under 53.5 fps—a rating that's better than some desktop systems of a few months ago. The GeForce2Go is limited to two pixel pipelines and either 64-bit DDR (or SDR) or 128-bit SDR memory, which does limit overall memory bandwidth. However, gorgeous LCD on the Inspiron only resolves 18-bit color anyway, so 16-bit color is the sweet spot for gaming on this rig. Note that 32-bit color performance isn't bad, as the 3D WinBench 2000 score of 64.2 indicates.

The only minor quibble on the performance side is the relatively low Content Creation WinBench score, which is due mostly to the somewhat pokey hard drive (typical of most portable systems). But the Inspiron's hard drive is a whopping 30GB, so it makes up in capacity what it lacks in sheer speed. The only other negative is the relatively short battery life (1 hour, 50 minutes), but most full-featured notebook PCs like this get connected to wall outlets anyway. You do have the option of installing a second battery, but at the expense of the DVD/CD drive, which isn't usually an option with most games. Be aware that the unit weighs in at a somewhat bulky 7.3 pounds. Numbers are fine, but how does it really play? The Inspiron is an excellent gaming platform. Plug in a standard mouse (trackpads don't cut it for gaming), and you'd never notice that it wasn't a desktop PC. I spent some extended time with UNREAL TOURNAMENT, COLIN MCCRAE RALLY 2.0, and HALF-LIFE: COUNTERSTRIKE, all of which ran superbly. EA's USAF looked good, too, as did QUAKE III. All in all, the only reason I noticed it was a laptop during gameplay was the relatively small size of the screen. Even the keyboard layout worked well for me.

In the end, if you're looking for a portable gaming platform, look no further than the Inspiron 8000 with the GeForce2Go. It may not be svelte, but that bulk is sheer muscle. There's absolutely no fat on this powerlifter.

—Loyd Case

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>>> Industry Bytes - Continued

also be shipping 1GHz mobile chipsets, the upstart chip manufacturer hit a few snags along the way. By the time you read this, however, they should be shipping as well.

How NOT to Gain Market Share

Apple recently announced that Mac OSX, the company's latest operating system, will not support CD-RW, DVD, or DVD-R drives. Huh?!

Falling Flat-Panel Prices?

The Rolexes of computing, flat-panel monitors are toys that often only the wealthy can boast. This may change, though, as prices have begun to plummet. Some attribute the price-drop to an abundance of LCD glass that was manufactured overseas in expectation of an increase in the sale of laptop computers.

Mad for Benchmarks

MadOnion recently released the

Embarrassing to look at, but fun

Like Riding a Moped



I have a problem—well, I have plenty of problems. But I'm only gonna talk about one of them here. I love to poke fun at people who play RPGs. Why in the hell would a grown man want to run around a make-believe forest sprinkling pixie dust this way and that?

My upper hand in this war of "I'm cooler than you" came up short while I was "testing" Thrustmaster's Afterburner Joystick. Our Editor in Chief, George Jones, happened to come into my office.

"Dude," he said in amazement, "you're not a flight-sim guy, are you?" Laughing all the way down the hall, he couldn't hear my cries of desperation. "I was just testing this joystick! Really. I was."

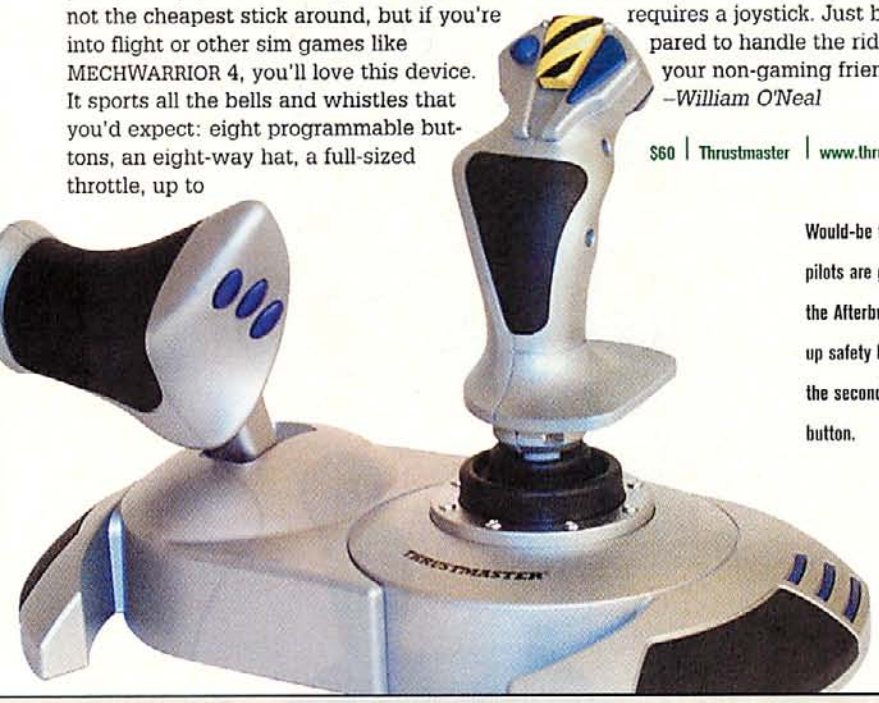
But I digress, Stripped of every coolness point I may have earned throughout my life, I am now free to admit that yes, I am a flight-sim guy, and that the Afterburner is a pretty cool joystick. Coming in at $60, it's not the cheapest stick around, but if you're into flight or other sim games like MECHWARRIOR 4, you'll love this device. It sports all the bells and whistles that you'd expect: eight programmable buttons, an eight-way hat, a full-sized throttle, up to 60 programmable functions, and even two rudder options. And, it feels great.

My only problems with it are its size and the alternate rudder control. If having a full-size throttle is a necessity, though, then the Afterburner's size is a non-issue. If, however, space is at a premium, you'll be glad that you can detach the throttle from the rest of the joystick. But now you don't have a throttle. And unlike many—nay, most—joysticks the Afterburner boasts two rudder options: your standard twisting handle, and this strange rocking knob. While the twisting handle worked fine in games like COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2 and MECHWARRIOR 4, the rocking knob (I love saying that) lacked the fine touch needed to twist your Mech ever so slightly.

Basically, it boils down to this: The Afterburner is a good, solid-feeling joystick and it has all the programmability and buttons you'd need to play any game that requires a joystick. Just be prepared to handle the ridicule from your non-gaming friends.

–William O'Neal

$60 | Thrustmaster | www.thrustmaster.com



Would-be fighter pilots are gonna dig the Afterburner's flip-up safety button over the secondary fire button.



We need new benchmarks, like now!

At this year's Intel Developers Forum, Loyd Case and I got to see the new GeForce3 GPU (codename NV20) in action. Of course, it's no surprise that the demonstration kicked some serious ass —nVidia's core technology is the graphics muscle behind Microsoft's Xbox.

But besides providing some serious visual punch, the demo proved provocative in one other way. As we watched the sizzle-fest, something struck us: We desperately need new benchmarks for testing the latest batch of graphics cards.

Graphics cards are so powerful nowadays that achieving super-fast frame-rates is a no-brainer. Sure, some cards earn higher scores on tests that measure anti-aliasing or fill rate; but we need a benchmark that measures not how fast a card is, but how realistic the images it spits out are.

Ever since 3dfx—remember them?—came out with the first Voodoo chipset, gamers have relied upon frame-rate as the primary measuring stick. Several Voodoo iterations later, nVidia's ascent to the graphics card throne means graphics cards that are capable of achieving frame-rate deltas the human eye can't even detect. In other words, is it worth shelling out $600 so that you can play QUAKE III at 120FPS as opposed to 100FPS? We don't think so. Frame-rates alone don't provide a full picture anymore.

continued on page 108

latest version of its 3D benchmarking software, 3DMark2001. Boasting support for DirectX8, 3DMark2001 also contains optimizations for Intel and AMD processors, as well as tests for Pixel and Vertex shading. Visit the company's website at madonion.com to download a limited free version of the benchmark.

GeForce3 Anyone?

ASUSTek recently jumped into the GeForce3 ring by announcing their GeForce3-based V8200 graphics card. The V8200 will come in two flavors: Pure and the Deluxe, which boasts TV-out, video-in, and 3D VR glasses. The cards will retail at $549 and $598 respectively, and both should be available in April 2001.

Don't Count Out S3

S3 Graphics recently unveiled its latest mobile graphics chip, the SuperSavage. With support for both DDR and SDRAM memory, the SuperSavage will also boast a 143MHz 128-bit 3D engine, AGP 4x, a core clock frequency equal to that of nVidia's GeForce2Go, and S3's little-used S3TC technology.

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review



Great idea, great sound; flawed execution

The Cuisinart of Sound Cards

HERCULES GAMETHEATER XP
$149 Manufacturer: Hercules (Guillemot) www.hercules.com

★★★★½

Don't get me wrong, the GameTheater XP is a very cool piece of hardware. I mean, who wouldn't want a sound card that adds multiple connections—including a game port and 4 USB ports—to your desktop. Throw in superb audio quality, excellent performance in games that support 3D audio, and a boatload of good software to boot. Unfortunately, as you've no doubt guessed, there is a caveat. But more on that in a moment.

The GameTheater XP uses the Crystal CS4230 audio chip to deliver superb audio performance. It will even accelerate MP3 audio playback. At first blush, accelerating MP3 playback doesn't seem significant—but we'll be seeing MP3 used more and more in game audio, and the ability to accelerate it takes some of the load off the CPU. One nifty tool Guillemot packs in with the card is Sensaura's Virtual Ear utility. Considering that not all ears are created equal, Virtual Ear allows you to tune the 3D audio field to sound right for your ears and speaker placement.

Performance is good, too. Audio WinBench reports a CPU utilization of less than 0.2% when rendering 32 streams of 3D audio at 44.1KHz/16-bit resolution—the best we've seen yet. Audio quality, too, is no slouch; there's no detectable "noise" when you crank up the sound with no content being played, and UNREAL TOURNAMENT with full 3D audio turned up sounded terrific.

So what's not to like? Minor glitches in the overall execution, for starters. When you plug headphones into the convenient 1/4-inch jack on the breakout box, the speakers stay live; you have to manually switch to headphones in the control panel or turn down your speakers. But the breakout box and how it's attached is the biggest headache. Sure, the blue connector box looks cool, but the thing is bigger than a Gideon Bible, and connects to the sound card by a cable only slightly smaller than a young anaconda. It's awkward and takes up way too much space on your desk, and it's too wide to sit on top of a tower case comfortably.

The bottom line is that the GameTheater XP offers superb sound and a rich feature set—just make sure you have room for it.

—Loyd Case



WIL POWER (CONTINUED)

After viewing the GeForce3 demo, it wasn't so much the speed of the GPU that impressed us. Rather, it was how realistic the images looked as compared to those rendered with earlier cards. Which is why I implore the industry to come up with what I call WifeMark 2001.

My wife Jen likes computer games about as much as Hugh Hefner likes middle-aged women. How I can play a game like HALF-LIFE for hours on end is beyond her. "Not only do all the characters look the same," she complains, "They don't even look like real people."

So this is how WifeMark2001 would work. You'd install card A in your machine, fire up a game like UNREAL TOURNAMENT, GIANTS, or SWAT 3. My wife would try to watch it. The longer she could tolerate the game, the higher the score. Hell, the card could get extra WifeMarks if she were to say things like, "Wow, that almost looks real." Well, what are you all waiting for? CGW

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review

What do you get when you cross a 1.33GHz Athlon, a GeForce3, and Falcon's attention to detail? A really fast computer, that's what.

As Fast as They Get

Reviewing systems like this 1.33GHz-based Athlon machine from Falcon Northwest presents a quandary.

Technologically, there's no reason to give this machine anything less than five stars: It boasts a 1.33GHz Athlon CPU, Hercules' venerable GeForce3-based 3D Prophet III graphics card, Hercules' GameTheater XP sound card, 256MB RAM, a 60GB hard drive, a DVD-ROM drive, and a CD-RW drive. In a way, it's like judging whether or not a Porsche 911GT2 should be given *Car and Driver*'s highest rating because it's fast. Sticking with that analogy, is it right to come to the conclusion that this Falcon Mach V should get five stars because, like the Porsche, it's fast? Unfortunately, ratings are a little more difficult to come to.

When it came to benchmarks, the numbers that this machine spit out didn't surprise us at all. Thanks in large part to the GeForce3 GPU sitting inside of it, this baby pumped out an impressive 3D WinBench score of 182 and an even more impressive 3D GameGauge score of 99! That's fast. In fact, it's one of the fastest scores we've seen to date.

Being a Falcon Northwest machine, nothing was spared when it came to quality. Shipping with Windows ME installed, storage options are also a plenty. The hard drives come in the form of a 60GB RAID interface and there's also a 16/10/40 CD-RW from Plextor to boot. Whew!

When it comes to multimedia, too, this machine is no slouch. Sound is handled through Hercules' GameTheater XP, a more than capable sound card option that boasts more plugs, inputs, and outputs than Neo. We didn't even mind the GameTheater's bulky breakout box. We experienced the GameTheater's quality sound via a set of Klipsch ProMedia 4.1s. Not bad at all. And of course, there's that GeForce3 thing too.

Where the Mach V series starts to lose some of its shine is when you look at the sticker price. Coming in at nearly $4000, it's significantly more expensive than, say, a similarly configured machine from Dell or Gateway. I say "similarly" because neither of those companies can build you a machine like this. That said, the similarly configured Dell or Gateway machines won't be able to boast the benchmark numbers that the Falcon machine can. The big question is "what is this extra speed worth to you?" Also, all that processing power meant that the machine made a whole lot of noise. While it wasn't a problem during gaming, watching movies, or listening to music, I was definitely aware that the machine was there.

It's hard not to recommend the Mach V. It's a super-fast machine and building it yourself would easily set you back another $1000! Not to mention the headache of getting your home-built machine up and running. If you're a serious power gamer and you're not afraid of the sticker price, than I see no reason why you wouldn't be happy with this machine. If, however, your MasterCard is already burgeoning from all those unauthorized porn charges, you may want to consider building a Falcon machine that isn't quite so "top-of-the-line."

—William O'Neal



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TECHEDICS

You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

Which Processor Should I Buy?

I'm thinking of ordering a system from Alienware and I was gonna get a machine with an AMD T-Bird 1.2GHz processor. But they also have an Intel Pentium 4 for about the same price. Which processor would you choose, and have you heard of either processor having any issues with games?

Since they're the ones that are gonna build your machine, I forwarded your message along to Gerald Zapata, Sales Manager at Alienware. This is what he had to say:

"Alienware has extensively tested both processors, and as a result, both processors are very stable and compatible with all your current games. But Intel's Pentium 4 will eventually outperform even the fastest AMD processors currently available as soon as games optimized for it are released. The Pentium 4 also uses the fastest Front-Side Bus of all the processors that are available now, 400MHZ. Another good thing to keep in mind is that the Pentium 4 has been optimized for Microsoft's upcoming Windows XP, which means even more potential for extra power from the processor."

Whew! An easy one.

I have a machine with a 550MGhz Athlon, 256MB of RAM, and a TNT2 Ultra. Would a GeForce2 MX or an ATI Radeon with 32MB of DDR be much of an upgrade over my present video card?

Yes.

Getting That Bass On

I'm planning to buy a speaker system for my computer but I can't seem to decide between the Klipsch Promedia v2-400 and the Cambridge Soundworks DTT3500 Digital. I know that both deliver very good sound in audio CDs, DVDs, and gaming, of course. But which system should I buy? By the way, since the Promedias don't have an S/PDIF input jack and a Dolby Digital Decoder like the DTT3500, how do I connect it to my system to get rich 5.1 Digital sound?

Get the Cambridge Soundworks DTT3500 Digital. As for pros, both systems kick ass. The Cambridge set, however, has the S/PDIF input that you want, so that ought to solve your input problem. As for cons, you mentioned the Klipsch's biggest one—a lack of an S/PDIF input. The Cambridge's only real drawback is the price. At $300, they're nearly $50 more than the Klipsch's. But what do you care? It's just money.

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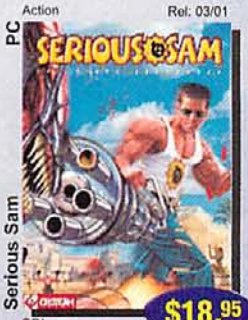
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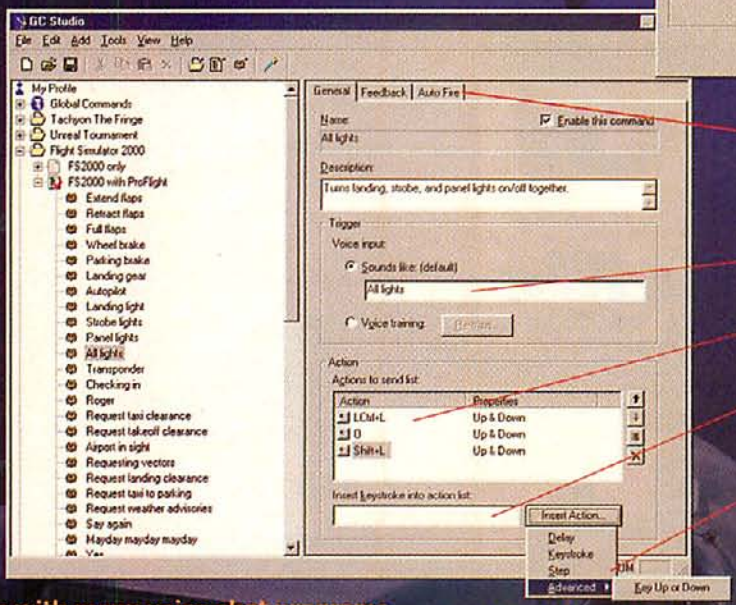
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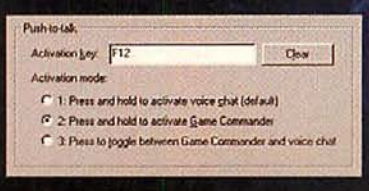
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FIGHT THE URGE (TO BE NICE)

USING MIRACLES

Although Black & White's extraordinary Creatures tend to grab most of the attention, Miracles and the way that you use them are just as important. Miracles are what being a god is all about. From resource-based magic to feats that can literally shake the landscape, there are 22 unique Miracles that you can attempt to access. These Miracles can be "cast" by both you and your Creature, giving you the opportunity to form a devastating partnership as you battle for control of the various maps.

As we'll mention throughout this strategy guide, the people are the ultimate source of your power in Black & White. Even if you decide to play as an evil deity, you need the loyal worship of your followers to charge up the Miracles available to you. And the more villages you control, the wider the array of Miracles you can cast. Playing Black & White is a constant balancing act of short-term strategic goals (such as empire expansion) and a more long-term objective (say, the destruction of an opposing god). Whether you want access to the Heal Miracle to revive tiring villagers or the Mega Blast to attack an enemy village, most Miracles run on pure, unrefined "people power". One-Shots are the exception.

THE WORSHIP SITE

Without a Worship Site, you'll have no access to any of the Miracles displayed on the Village Centre. Fortunately, once you have gained control of a settlement, its inhabitants will automatically build a Worship Site for you. Unfortunately, they don't build it very quickly. There can be a long delay between conquering a village and being able to use the Miracle knowledge that it possesses—especially if your new acquisition is halfway across the map from your Temple. You can speed up the construction process by hand-delivering the villagers who trek across the landscape to build the new Worship Site. The Teleport Miracle is another useful way of shortening the journey. Cast it (if available) outside the target village before you begin converting the village.



It can take a long time for the inhabitants of a village to build you a Worship Site.

THE VILLAGE TOTEM

Even with a completed Worship Site, Miracles need to be charged up with Prayer Power from your villagers. By raising and lowering the Totem in each Village Centre, you can adjust the number of villagers who make the pilgrimage to your Temple to charge up your Miracles. Send too many, and there will be nobody left behind to harvest food, chop down trees, or expand the population. Dispatch too few, however, and your Miracles will take longer to become active—the smaller the crowd of worshippers, the less Prayer Power produced.

Strike a balance by designating Disciples to look after the village and sending the majority of your people to the Temple. Provide Food and Healing where necessary, or lower the Totem after a while to let the fanatical worshippers recover.

MIRACLE TYPES

On the following pages, you'll find a rundown of all the Miracles featured in Black & White, including information on whether they can be powered up, how much Prayer Power they cost to cast, and how best to use them. We've split the Miracles into two categories: General (these can be cast by both players and Creatures) and Creature (Miracles that have a specific effect on Creatures, such as Freeze.) Miracles are cast using the Action button and can be selected via the Temple and Village Centre, or via the appropriate Miracle gesture.

Food

Prayer Power cost: 7,000

Power-ups: Food Miracle Increase

The Food Miracle doesn't require much in the way of explanation. Once selected and charged, it generates a limited-use Horn of Plenty, a food-crammed container from which you can pour around 710 units of nosh. Relatively cheap to cast, the Food Miracle is vital for delivering emergency supplies wherever they are needed—the Worship Site, for example. If used in conjunction with the Aztec Wonder, the Food Miracle gets a boost and delivers almost twice the amount of food.

Wood

Prayer Power cost: 7,000

Power ups: None

Along with the Food and Water Miracles, the Wood Miracle is one of the most basic powers, yet also one of the most useful. Once selected and suitably charged, it can generate a maximum of 710 units of Wood anywhere within your Influence.



Forest

Prayer Power cost: 13,000

Power-ups: None

As its name suggests, the Forest Miracle creates an area filled with new trees. What you get for your Prayer Power is one large central tree surrounded by several smaller ones. It sounds like the perfect solution to wood shortage problems, but unfortunately, the Forest Miracle is only a temporary magical effect. Maintaining the existence of the trees requires the Prayer Power of your worshippers.

Send villagers to your Temple by raising and lowering the village Totem.



NO MATTER HOW MUCH THEY BEG, PLEAD, OR MOO NO MERCY

You can quickly uproot and dump the new trees in the Village Store, but the Forest-generated trees convert to barely more than 2,000 units of wood. To get a decent return, you need to let the trees grow. However, because the Miracle is temporary, you run the risk of losing the Forest as your Prayer Power level drops.



Water

Prayer Power
cost: 5,000

Power-ups: Water Miracle Increase

As one of the first Miracles you are introduced to in Black & White, the Water Miracle is quick to charge and equally speedy to unleash. It's primarily useful for watering the crops in your fields, but it also performs an Emergency Services role in putting out fires started by Fireballs and lightning strikes. The Water Miracle can be upgraded by one level (summoning a bigger cloud and more rain), but only if you have constructed the Celtic Wonder in the village where the Miracle is located. If your Creature masters this Miracle, he can use it to tend to crops in your absence and to quickly put himself out if he catches fire during a battle.



Storm

Prayer Power
cost: 8,000

Power-ups: Storm Miracle Increase, Storm Miracle Extreme

The Storm Miracle can be used as both a defensive ground-drencher (for putting out fires) and an offensive magical weapon (for attacking and impressing other villages). In its bog-standard incarnation, the Storm produces a large, sprawling cloud that releases heavy rain over an area that you specify. This Miracle (like the two Shield Miracles) is activated by tracing a casting circle with the mouse. Powered up by a Norse Wonder, the Storm Miracle becomes the Storm Miracle Increase, adding lightning to the thundery mix. The second-level power-up (Storm Miracle Extreme) combines rain, lightning, and a violent tornado to produce some dramatic area-effect sorcery.



Heal

Prayer Power
cost: 6,000

Power-ups: Heal Miracle Increase

The Heal Miracle tends to be widely and immediately available on every game map, and it is a vital power if you want to keep hard-working (and hard-praying) villagers healthy and happy. Cast among a crowd of people, the Heal Miracle has a small area of effect and essentially boosts a villager's Life statistic, replacing the need for sleep. The Heal Miracle can be powered up only once (via the Japanese Wonder), at which point the healing zone it covers is widened. Like many of the Miracles featured here, casting the Heal Miracle also gains you increased Belief from villagers.

Spiritual Shield

Prayer Power
cost: 7,000

Power-ups: None

Like the Physical Shield, Forest, and Teleport Miracles, the Spiritual Shield, activated via a casting circle, requires constant Prayer Power to maintain its integrity. The bigger the Shield, the more Prayer Power is required to anchor it in place. Villagers will not be impressed by another god's actions if they are safely within the pearlescent dome of a Spiritual Shield, which is linked to the Tibetan tribe (who will often have this Miracle as standard). You shouldn't expect to power a Spiritual Shield for long. It's best used as a temporary measure to stop an attacking god, while you reply with a counter-strike that's designed to draw the expansionist deity away.

Physical Shield

Prayer Power
cost: 7,000

Power-ups: None

Lessons in casting both the Spiritual and Physical Shields are part of the Story Mode on Land Two. It's important to know how to use these Miracles effectively, as summoned Shields tend to be slightly smaller than the casting circle that you trace. Consequently, it's worth designating a slightly bigger area than you actually need, just to make sure that the Shield protects what you want it to. While the Spiritual Shield screens your population from the effects of impressive Miracles, the Physical version provides some defense against rocks that are thrown at you. No power-up applies to either of the Miracle Shields.





EVERY SWEET HAS ITS SOUR; EVERY EVIL ITS GOOD

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Winged Creatures

Prayer Power cost: 12,000

Power-ups: None

While most Miracles tend to impress watching villagers, most are also designed to fulfill a vital function—the provision of food or water, the ability to heal, and so on. In contrast, the Winged Creatures Miracle is a pretty spell, designed purely to impress a village's inhabitants and to gain Belief in desirable large chunks. Once charged, the Winged Creatures Miracle releases a flight of doves (good alignment) or bats (evil alignment) from the casting point. After casting, the Winged Creatures will fly away from the camera view. Like most Miracles, this one works best when unleashed in front of a crowd. Don't expect to gain many oohs and ahhs of Belief if there are only a couple of Farmers to see it.



Pack of Animals

Prayer Power cost: 14,000

Power-ups: None

The Pack of Animals Miracle is essentially a ground-based version of the Winged Creatures Miracle. Like the previous Miracle, Pack of Animals summons an impressive horde of wild beasts which will run away from the camera after casting. The only difference between this spell and the Winged Creatures Miracle is the fact that the animals may turn on the villagers they have impressed. If you plan to let loose the Miracle in the center of a village, pay close attention to the aftermath. Of course, if you are trying to convert a neutral or enemy-controlled settlement, a little villager wastage is often unavoidable.



Teleport

Prayer Power cost: 5,000

Power-ups: None

The Teleport Miracle provides an enticing benefit but at an inconvenient cost. The miniature vortices produced by the Miracle can shorten the distance between villagers or quickly link villagers with hard-to-reach natural resources. The Teleport is also useful for providing villagers with a quick route to their Worship Site at your Temple—especially if the village is located some distance away. The downside to these swirling pink gateways is that you need to cast the Teleport Miracle twice (once for the entrance and again for the exit) and supply constant Prayer Power to maintain them. Both villagers and your Creature will be able to make use of Teleports, and they can be picked up and moved (recast) if necessary.



Fireball

Prayer Power cost: 3,500

Power-ups: Fireball Miracle Increase, Fireball Miracle Extreme

The Fireball can quickly become one of a god's main weapons—so much damage from such a tiny ball of flame. The Fireball's strength is that it causes collateral damage, setting alight anything made of wood that it comes into contact with: houses, civic buildings, whole forests, and so on. To use the Miracle successfully, you need to master how much weight to put behind your throws. Too much, and it will soar over your intended target. Too little, and it will skid harmlessly along the ground. In some cases, moving the mouse after casting will apply Aftertouch and slightly alter the direction of the flaming missile. More importantly, by bringing an Aztec tribe into your empire, you have the ability to build an Aztec Wonder. This magical source will power up the basic Miracle into three- and five-Fireball variants.

TIP: You can put out fires using the Water or Storm Miracles.



Lightning Bolt

Prayer Power cost: 5,000

Power-ups: Lightning Bolt Miracle Increase, Lightning Bolt Miracle Extreme

For aeons, the Lightning Bolt has been a god's favorite Miracle. Just as this heavenly electricity was available to Zeus, it's available to you in three devastating packages. The basic Lightning Bolt unleashes stabbing fingers of energy in front of the god that casts it. Hold down the Action button and you can focus the crackling power towards a single point, such as a building. Tap the Action button and you can fire off quick bursts of Lightning at multiple targets while causing little real damage. The latter method is useful for when you wish to impress a village with a light show rather than set fire to it. There are two powered-up versions of the Lightning Bolt offering increased electrical power. Invest in an Aztec Wonder to use them.



Mega Blast

Prayer Power cost: 16,000

Power-ups: Mega Blast Miracle Increase, Mega Blast Miracle Extreme

Mega Blast is the most destructive of all Black & White Miracles, so opportunities to use it are often few and far between. Play the last land in the Story Mode, and Nemesis will unleash the Mega Blast Miracle Extreme (five focused beams of energy) in an attempt to stop you from reaching his Temple. It's an awesome sight, a pure shaft of power that explodes whatever it touches. Destructive deities might like to know that the Mega Blast can be powered up twice by the construction of an Aztec Wonder. It's the perfect way to wipe an enemy off the game map.

ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL

BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS

George Orwell "Animal Farm"

Freeze
Prayer Power cost: Varies

Power-ups: None

This is an especially useful Miracle if you want to gain an advantage over an enemy with a slightly stronger Creature. By activating the Miracle on an enemy's Creature, you encase the beast in a bodysuit of ice. You then have a short time to operate without your rival's interference. It may give you just the opportunity you need to take a strategic village or rebuild a shattered settlement.



Enlarge
Prayer Power cost: 7,000

Power-ups: None

The sheer size of your Creature can gain you Belief from any villagers who see it—the bigger the Creature, the larger the Belief gained. Ideally, you should spend time developing your beast on the early and relatively safe Story Mode lands. But for a quick fix, the Enlarge Creature Miracle allows you to temporarily boost your Creature's tonnage. Try casting it just before you attempt to impress a new village.



Strength
Prayer Power cost: 8,000

Power-ups: None

The Strength Miracle is one of five different powers that can be cast when two Creatures are involved in a battle. As you'd expect, by tracing the Strength gesture on the ground (without holding the mouse buttons down) you can temporarily boost the mightiness of your beast. The stronger you can make him, the more damage he can do when he strikes his opponent.

Weakness
Prayer Power cost: 8,000

Power-ups: None

The opposite to the Strength Miracle, this is another Miracle that can be cast during the heat of Creature conflict. When aimed at an opponent it will not only reduce his offensive power but also affect how much damage he takes. But take care that you don't accidentally cast the Miracle on your own Creature while he's locked in a magical punch-up.



Invisible
Prayer Power cost: 9,000

Power-ups: None

While fully grown Creatures are certainly powerful, they are hardly the most stealthy beasts, and it's difficult for them to sneak up on an enemy village without tipping off the god that owns it. This Miracle is an attempt to add a little covert action to the Black & White gameplay, allowing you to render your Creature almost invisible for a short period of time. Note that the magical sparkle that surrounds your Creature can still be seen.

Compassion
Prayer Power cost: 6,000

Power-ups: None

As its name suggests, the Compassion Miracle forces a Creature to be kind and nice no matter what Leash he is attached to. Like the Shrink Miracle and the Freeze Miracle (mentioned earlier), this magical power enables you to deflect an angry attack from an opponent's Creature. It might save your buildings from getting a kicking, but not for very long.



Aggression
Prayer Power cost: 6,000

Power-ups: None

The Aggression Miracle is the direct opposite of the Compassion Miracle. This one, however, is perhaps more useful: When it is cast on a Creature he will become angry with everything around him—even his own villages. If you can manage to cast this Miracle on an enemy Creature while he stands in one of his own settlements, you can force him to inflict damage on his own empire.

Holy Flies
Prayer Power cost: 8,000

Power-ups: None

Like the Freeze Miracle, the Holy Flies spell is designed to stop a Creature from doing anything for a short period of time. While the Freeze Miracle turns Creatures into ice statues, Holy Flies afflicts them with itches that they just have to scratch. Creatures will be preoccupied with their temporary skin disease until the Miracle fades.

> **RELIGION IS THE MASTERPIECE OF THE ART OF ANIMAL TRAINING, FOR IT TRAINS PEOPLE AS TO HOW THEY SHALL THINK**
>
> **Arthur Shopenhauer**



GODLY COMBAT

Because every BLACK & WHITE map pits god against god in a battle for the hearts and minds of the villagers who live there, it won't be long before you clash directly with another expansionist omnipotence. To fight other gods is to battle against their Influence on the landscape and the Belief that people have in them. Without these, your enemies are nothing.

While, as a god, you are really little more than a disembodied hand and a watchful eye, you do have a "body" that can be attacked and damaged. This is your Temple, not only the focus of your power but also the last bastion of your very existence. You need to do everything you can to protect it from attack. To this end, you can use all of the Miracles available to you, as well as objects scattered around the landscape. While Creature combat (detailed in the next chapter) is a traditional one-on-one melee, godly combat can be aimed at enemy villages, their inhabitants, and even the enemy Creature. When you are forced to defend yourself, or just want to flex your ethereal pecs, try some of the tactics that follow.

ROCK THROWING

Rocks don't cost you anything to deploy and can be extremely effective when aimed successfully. Use them to damage opposing buildings—this should focus your enemy's attention in the village that you are attacking, giving you space to attack another target. In games against the computer AI, you'll find that an opponent will quickly erect Physical Shields to protect a threatened settlement. Because these cost Prayer Power to maintain, they limit the enemy's casting options. Finally, keep rocks at a safe distance from your borders. The last thing you want is for your opponent to use his "virtual Influence" to steal your precious ammunition.

SCORCHED-EARTH POLICY

To attack gods is to strike at the things that are most important to them. If you have Fireball Miracles active in your arsenal of powers, try hurling a few with the intention of setting fire to your opponent's forests. Wood is a vital resource in BLACK & WHITE, and without sufficient natural resources, a god will be forced to rely on Miracles and Creature assistance for his lumber. Note: Although Fireballs can be immensely destructive, it's possible for a god to catch one before it hits the ground and throw it back.

FLAMING MISSILES

In a variation on the Fireball attack mentioned above, you might also want to try setting fire to a group of trees and throwing them at an enemy village or Creature. Admittedly, trees aren't aerodynamically suited for throwing, but this method gives you a number of flaming objects rather than just one Fireball. Similarly, by placing boulders in the middle of a forest and then setting fire to the trees, you can heat up the rocks until they glow orange. These can then be thrown at the enemy to not only flatten buildings, but also to set them alight. Creatures can catch fire too, so throwing this type of hot rock at your opponent's beast can be very effective—that is, unless the god has taught the Creature how to play "catch."



Look after your rocks. They have many purposes, one of which is clouting people on the back of the head!

ONE-SHOT MIRACLES

Like the boulder bombs recommended above, One-Shot Miracles can be used to attack an opposing god's villages and Creature. Again, whenever you unearth a One-Shot Miracle Seed, make sure that you store it far away from your borders. Leave them too close to your opponent's sphere of Influence and he may be able to steal them. Of course, this tactic works both ways.

DIVERSIONARY ATTACKS

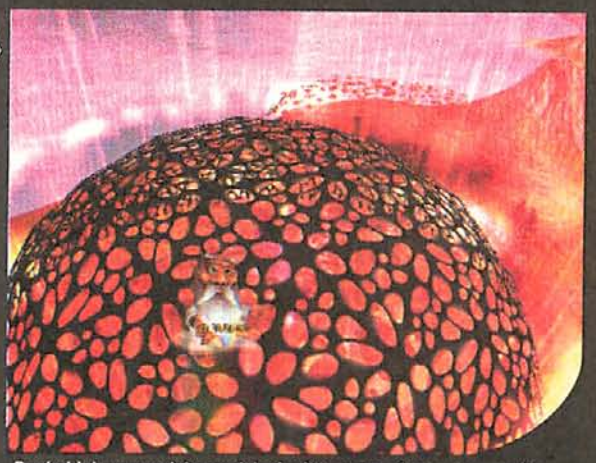
You may find it useful to widen your strategy, and attack or impress more than one village simultaneously. For example, you can use Missionary Disciples in one settlement and send your Creature to another one while you concentrate on a third. This will pose your opponent something of a problem, as he'll need to decide which of his villages he can defend. If you employ scorched-earth tactics or indulge in a little rock throwing, you can often keep an opponent distracted while you work to expand your Influence and Belief elsewhere.



Why not attack or impress more than one village at a time?

SHIELDS

It's fairly easy to pick up a rock and throw it at your opponent's village, but you should expect an enemy to do the same to you. Because your borders are fragile, you need to get worshippers to their Worship Site at your Temple as quickly as possible. With stored Prayer Power you can erect temporary Physical and Spiritual Shields to deflect long-distance attacks, or use your Miracles to retaliate in the hope that striking your opponent as he attacks you will force him to stop and repair the damage. You can deprive a god of Prayer Power by directly attacking one of his Village Centres, which immediately recalls the worshippers from the Temple.



Don't think you can't be punished with a taste of your own medicine—other gods are often just as powerful as you are.

MORALITY IS THE HERD INSTINCT IN THE INDIVIDUAL

Nietzsche

THE REALLY WILD SHOW

Anything goes in godly combat, so nothing should be beneath you when it comes to protecting or expanding your Influence. Alongside hurled rocks (superheated or otherwise) and other godly bombardments, nature can be used to your advantage.

If you come across any wild animals (such as lions, tigers, and wolves) in your travels, you can sneakily pick one up and, should you be close enough, let it loose in an opponent's village.

Unless the opposing god is looking closely at the settlement or has pressed the S button to show villager Statistics, he may not spot villagers being eaten alive!

CREATURE POWER

As your empire expands, the role of your Creature begins to change. At the beginning of a map, he is used mostly to convert new villages and to supply existing settlements with resources. Once this setup phase is over you can use him in a variety of ways. You might want him to guard your frontier, or attack an enemy village before the opposing god can respond. You might also want to keep him locked in a series of battles with the opposing Creature, thereby canceling the two Creatures out. Teach him some offensive spells (such as Fireball and Lightning Bolt) and you'll have a mobile death bringer that can operate anywhere on the map. The big question you need to answer is: Where do I need my Creature most?



If you give your Creature a Miracle Seed, he'll instantly cast it.

ENACTING A PIXELATED MORALITY PLAY

BY ALEX HANDY AND THIERRY NGUYEN

Are you a god of light and kindness, or one of storms and brutality? Are your followers genuine people, or merely flesh-bottles of faith? While people assume there are two ways to play the game—good or evil—there are actually four ways, because both good and evil can be played the effective way and the my-creature-is-pooing-everywhere-and-I-don't-know-what-to-do way. Guess which way we're going to talk about here, for good and evil.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Be kind, be gentle, be thorough.

You can't be a good god without good listening skills. Your people will go out of their way to tell you exactly what they need to be happy and productive. They'll do this by raising flags around the village store, praying to you at the town center, and even shouting out their demands: "Need wood!" When they ask, make sure they receive. Your people, while the source of your power, are simple creatures, requiring only a few simple items for happiness. Therefore, once you've figured out how to satisfy their demands, your tribes should flourish.

Your people's needs are fairly basic: food, shelter, reproduction, and protection. Keep your village store filled to the brim with as many food and wood miracles as you can muster. Once your people have enough to eat, build. Your followers need homes most of all; otherwise they'll sit outside in the cold with little protection from the elements and the trials of evil gods. Expansion for the enterprising good deity can be a bit difficult. Tempting though it may be, you must always resist the urge to simply rush into a town with fireballs and lightening bolts flashing. Instead, try healing those wayward souls and bestowing gifts of wood, food, and water. Helping their crops grow with a well-placed shower can be an easy and cheap way to gain Belief.

Remember, though you are good, you can still be vain. Casting Miracles without an audience won't increase the size of your fold. Besides, even good gods need to show off now and then. Mass healings are one of the most effective ways to win over hearts and souls. Also, beautifying foreign villages with trees, rocks, and shrubs can give you the extra oomph you need to take them over.

Finally, don't forget about missionaries. If you've got enough breeders, you should be able to turn a good deal of your followers into proselytizers with the zeal of Mormons. For the opposition, missionaries can be just as troublesome in BLACK & WHITE as they can be in real life. With a force of around 20 or 30 missionaries, that next town can be yours in no time at all.

Once you've taken over a new town, however, don't neglect your older tribes. Remember, all of your followers require your assistance, and neglecting one group to favor another would not be a benevolent act. One way to keep your tribes under control is to balance your flock between cities. Send excess people to the smaller towns in order to swell your ranks and add some much needed labor. Try to share the burden as much as possible. And always remember: idle hands do the devil's work; be sure to keep all of your villagers busy with building, breeding, or worshiping.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Indifference, above all else, is the key to being evil.

Rather than being simply immoral in your actions, it's often better to be amoral. Feel free to be a pure sadist for the thrill of it, but what it all comes down to is, you need to do things that will yield the most benefit. You have to be the most practical of gods, and when you start placing practicality above such petty notions as "feelings" or "guilt," that is when you become an effectively evil god.

Consider your people. The benevolent god attempts to satisfy the various needs of his people. Such a deity is concerned with whether his followers have enough food, wood, protection, expansionist materials, and children. You need see your people only as nuggets of faith. As long as they're around and bearing your colors instead of your opponent's, you're fine. Whether they live or die, starve or are full, worship or rest, their presence is enough for you.

In fact, you should assign only a few tribespeople to actual labor, such as farming or forestry or building—just what is necessary. The rest of them should be dedicated to breeding. Most of your followers will die soon, so you'll do well to make sure that new followers are on the way.

"Good" gods like to maintain the delicate balance between worship and duty. They will vary their worship percentages, and make sure to keep their worshippers fed and healed. Evil has no room for such amenities. If you have worshippers, don't look after them. Those who die will be replaced by others soon enough.

Once you learn how to sacrifice for power, forgo worshippers altogether. Up the amount of breeders among your folk, and when you need to cast a Miracle, pluck a child from the crèche and drop it into the plate. Cheap, instant power. You'll need villagers for only a few things: sacrificing, breeding, and building. Resources don't have to be mined; just sacrifice a child and cast the appropriate Miracle—much more efficient than lording over your people.



Flatten buildings *and* set them on fire!

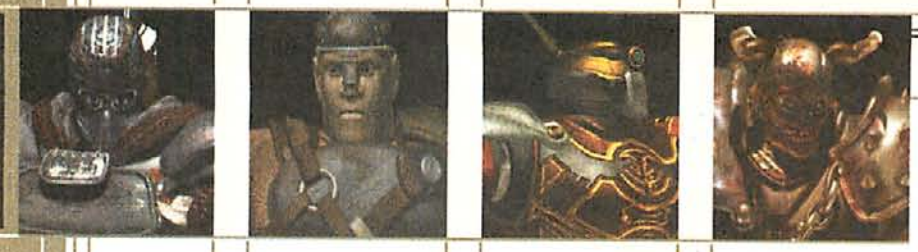
Don't be concerned with the condition of your towns when you convert them. Teach your creature to be as aggressive to the enemy as possible. Make it so that your creature showers the enemy with Lightning Bolts and Fireballs. Such acts of violence will impress the villagers, and those who aren't impressed usually end up dying.

Your goal is simply to take away power from your enemies. If they're stupid enough to attack your creature while it's pressing into town, let them be. Let their Lightning Bolts hit their own villagers; it's their problem. In fact, some gods are stupid enough to inflict more damage than what you're doing, and your creature might end up saving the town. If nothing else, you're reducing the enemy's power base. Once the town is converted, any survivors of your onslaught should be treated as bonus souls. Assign some survivors to breeding and others to becoming snacks for your creature, then continue your regime of sacrifice and violence. CGW

BE KIND, BE GENTLE, BE THOROUGH



PLEASED TO MEET YOU, HOPE YOU GUESS MY NAME...



FALLOUT TACTICS

BY CHRIS TAYLOR, SENIOR DESIGNER FOR FALLOUT TACTICS

NEW TO THE WASTELAND? READ THIS BEFORE GETTING YOURSELF BLOWN APART

A vision of nuclear winter always features grim images of decay and people fighting over mere scraps. It'd be a dangerous, cold world if the radiation hadn't heated everything up in its wake, leaving the temperature to settle down to a livable setting. The world of FALLOUT TACTICS: BROTHERHOOD OF STEEL (FOT) is such a place, and if you're just dipping in, here's a fast primer to get you up and running.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT GAME MODE

■ There are three game modes in FOT: continuous turn-based (CTB), squad turn-based (STB) and individual turn-based (ITB). If you have played the original FALLOUT role-playing games, then you will be most familiar with ITB, which works here just as it does in those games. I suggest the STB mode for single-player gaming, and CTB mode for multiplayer.

■ STB gives you the most control over your entire squad; you can select any character on the squad that has action points and move with that character during your turn. Hence, it's a lot easier to coordinate actions between characters.

■ CTB seems to be the most popular mode for online games. Playing CTB requires a slightly different set of tactics than the traditional turn-based modes. You'll need to take advantage of the different Sentry Mode buttons (check page 17 of the manual) and grouping hot-keys (page 15).

■ In single-player games, if the action gets too frantic you can switch to ITB mode immediately by pressing Enter. You can then select characters, target, attack and move at your leisure. Press Enter again to switch back to CTB. Don't get too used to this tactic though, as it won't work in multiplayer games.



SINGLE-PLAYER CAMPAIGN CHARACTERS

■ When playing the single-player campaign, you have a few options: You can pick a pregenerated character, modify a pregenerated character, or create your own character from scratch. Here's a quick rundown of the pregenerated characters:

MICK: Strong, agile, and tough. Mick makes a good all-around soldier.

SNAKE: Fast and sneaky. Use Snake if you want to get up-close and personal with your opponents.

PETER: Peter is a good leader. He's also a medic, which never hurts.

BETTY: She will make a good sniper. In addition to her gunplay, she's skilled with traps.

WILMA: You want to go bare-knuckle brawling like Bruce Lee? Pick her—she's the best one of the bunch for hand-to-hand and close combat.

■ If you don't want to make your own character, then Mick is probably the best all-around choice.

CHARACTER CREATION

■ When making your own character, you should pick a specific type of character and stick with it for the first couple of levels. It's worth it to concentrate on just a couple of skills at the start to master them before spreading your skill points around.

■ A combat-oriented character should have a high Agility because Agility determines your Action Points. There's no such thing as too many Action Points. Allocate a point or two to Strength to help offset heavy weapons, and boost Perception, to help your long-range attacks.

■ Small Frame and Gifted will give you some more character points to play with when tweaking your statistics.

■ The Small Guns skill is almost mandatory. The majority of early useful weapons use this skill. After that, pick skills that you think you'll always use. Sneak, Doctor, or Big Guns are good choices. You don't really need many characters with Gambling, Outdoorsman, Barter, or Piloting.

■ When making you own character in single-player, you have the choice of selecting Tough Guy. This'll give you 30 percent more experience, but you'll be able to save only at a Brother of Steel bunker. If you've played the game through once already, it's probably a good idea to take this option. Otherwise, if you can live with the occasional reload, give it some serious consideration.

■ If you're making characters for multiplayer, plan ahead. Look at the perk list in the manual (starting on page 40). List the perks you plan on taking, and make sure you can meet the requirements for each one. Some perks make no sense to take in multiplayer (Scout, for example). Focus on perks that improve movement, damage, action points, and other helpful combat abilities. If you pick a race besides Human, pick skills, traits, and perks that enhance an ability of that race or help with a deficiency. Don't pick skills that are unusable by the race, like Piloting for Dogs.

Combat Tips

■ The focus of combat is to do the most damage to the enemy while taking the least amount of damage in return. This can best be accomplished by using a combination of concentrated fire, long-range fire, traps, and stealth attacks.

■ Concentrated fire means multiple attacks against one target. Since it's difficult for one character to make multiple attacks at the same time, you'll want to use two or more characters attacking in tandem. In CTB, this means using the Grouping and Aggressive Sentry Mode functions. While Sentry Mode won't always pick the same target, it more than likely will, so using it is worth the risk. Just to be sure to occasionally use Defensive Mode and monitor that group's progress.

■ It's a lot easier in STB or ITB to concentrate fire properly. In either, you'll be able to cause enough damage to incapacitate or kill the target without needlessly expending ammo or action points.

■ Maintain some distance between the characters in your fire groups. You definitely do not want to fall prey to a single grenade or rocket explosion.

■ Depending on your objectives, having a sniper or two can make or break your mission. Snipers can inflict damage at a range that makes it difficult for the enemy to hit you in return. Snipers should be kept safe by a character wielding a short-range but high-damage weapon. An SMG on the sniper's protector works wonders.

■ When on the defensive, a character with the Traps skill and a backpack full of mines can easily pay for their points. One easy thing to do is trap potential points of entry. This makes it difficult for the aggressor to approach you. Traps are most effective when you can use multiple traps to make approaching an entry a difficult proposition.

■ Stealth attacks are different from using the Sneak skill, although that skill may make it a little easier to pull off a successful stealth attack. You generally want to move your fire groups to meet the enemy where he is not expecting you. Actions such as flanking attacks or moving behind the enemy allow you to concentrate fire from multiple angles.

■ If Friendly Fire is on (and it should be, as it makes for a much more interesting game), then remember to avoid "crossing the streams" and getting your characters in the firing lanes of their own squadmates.

■ You can use cover to your best advantage in STB or ITB mode. Use the kneeling stance to hide behind low cover or stand around a corner. Pop out, shoot, and return to cover. Using overwatch can help protect against these sorts of "pop-up" attacks. In CTB, it's generally more difficult to pull off (especially if everyone is using Aggressive Sentry Mode), but it can still be done.

■ Keep a medic in the back of the group. When someone gets hurt, return to the doctor and get healed. Conversely, your opponent's doctor should be a primary target. Remember that you can't get healed a lot without becoming bandaged or winded.

Keep these fundamentals in mind when you approach the battlefield, and good luck surviving the brutal wastelands of Fallout.





DESIGNER TIPS: PART TWO

Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter

Mash monsters with your mental minions in this month's installment

by J.E. Sawyer
Designer for Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter

Last month I talked about how to use your bruisers, singers, and sneakers in Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter. But the people who get the most in terms of the new stuff are the spell-casters. With a host of new spells, the three spell-casting classes are suddenly very potent party members, especially combined with the raw power discussed last month. With these tips, you'll know how to mop up any battle with your mental magical minions.

CLERIC

Clerics have many new spells available to them, though many of these can only be cast by clerics of a certain alignment. Read the descriptions of the cleric spells carefully to make certain your cleric can cast them. In general, good clerics can tap into the higher healing spells, while evil clerics get fewer of those but have access to spells like Slay Living.

With all the spells available to clerics, they have incredible flexibility in a variety of combat situations. New spells like Undead Ward and Holy Smite, for example, can do wonders on the Burial Isle. If you run into a difficult area, look to your cleric's spell list for a work-around.

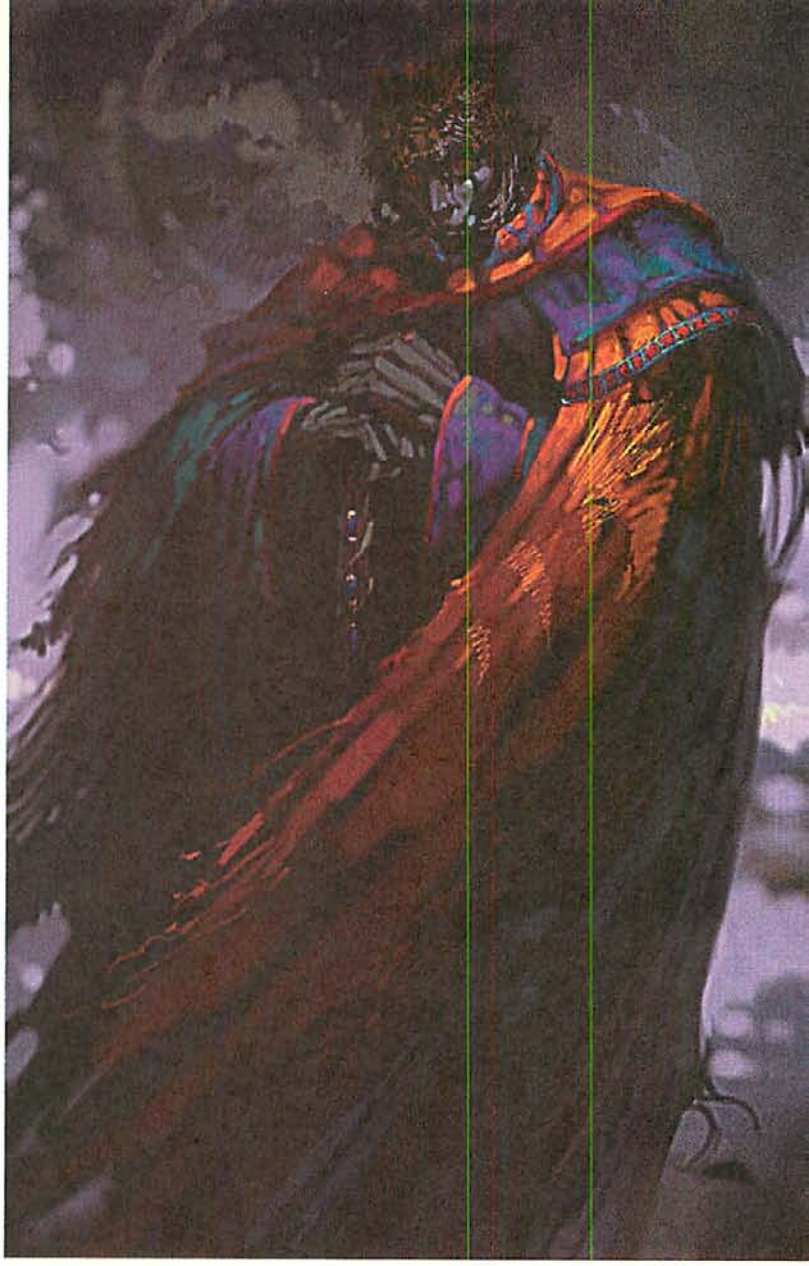
Don't underestimate the value of an evil cleric's access to the various Cause Wounds spells, Slay Living, and Destruction. The damage done by those spells, even if you've saved to that point, is "magic" damage. No creature in the game is resistant to pure magic damage, so you can be assured that the creature will lose a chunk of hit points no matter what.

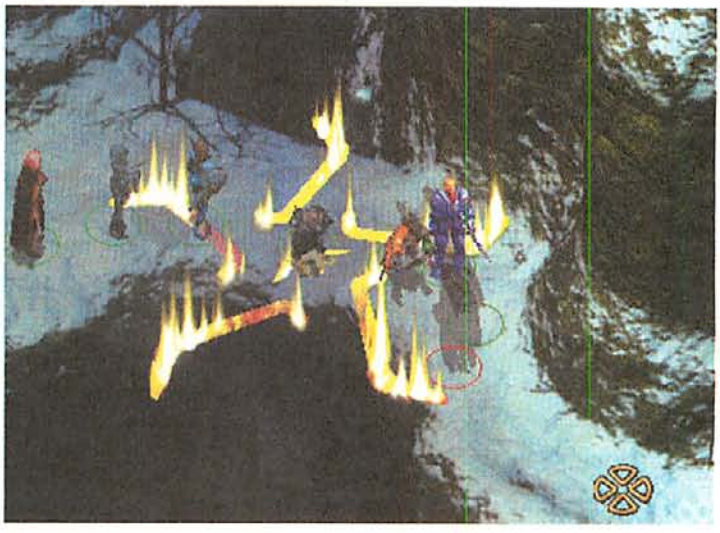
DRUID

The druids' new offensive spells make up for their lack of undead turning. Use Sunscorch, Moonblade, Wall of Moonlight, and Star Metal Cudgel to make short work of undead enemies. Here's a good tactic to try in undead-heavy areas: Start by scouting out the location of enemy undead with a party thief or ranger. Have your druid cast Moonblade. Follow that up with a Wall of Moonlight at a location the undead are certain to pour through. Cast Spike Growth into the area between your party and the undead. If the Spike Growth hits the enemies, it will start their slow movement toward the party. Cast Cloudburst over the region the undead are traveling through. As the undead come out of the fog of war, pelt them with missile weapons. Since your druid can't change weapons with Moonblade in operation, take the opportunity to down weakened undead with Sunscorch. As the undead finally move through the Wall of Moonlight, they'll be in such a weakened state that your druid should be able to down them with one or two swings.

Remember, a druid can get cheap and extremely effective healing by shape-changing. If your characters are about to rest, simply have your wounded druid cycle through his or her available animal forms. If the party's rest is interrupted, the druid will be in a much better position to fight.

Druids now have one spell in their arsenal that is useful for





NOT BURT WARD If the undead are bothering you, have a cleric slap down an Undead Ward to make things right.



SUN TAN Sunscorch is the most useful level-one anti-undead spell, since it'll quickly deliver the pain to any undead near the target.



EARL, MEET LANCE Fling a Lance of Disruption for some quick, direct, blunt damage to whoever's in your way.

disrupting packs of enemy spellcasters: Thorn Spray. It probably won't down any enemies, but its unique area of effect and low piercing damage makes it ideal for spell disruption. Also try using Smashing Wave as a powerful complement to Lightning Bolt; as long as you compensate for these spells' long casting times, you can hit your targets hard with this combination.

Two of the druids' high-level powers make them immune to the dire effects of some powerful spells. When a druid receives his or her poison immunity, feel free to send the character running into Cloudkill spells, at dark elf crossbowmen, or into a melee with poisonous spiders. When that same character gains immunity to fatigue, use Haste for devastating effect. A Hasted druid with Beast Claws and Animal Rage is a powerful melee combatant. If you have access to the Girdle of Labelas or Oil of Speed, give them to the druid. If you need to Haste the druid only, you won't unnecessarily fatigue the rest of the party.

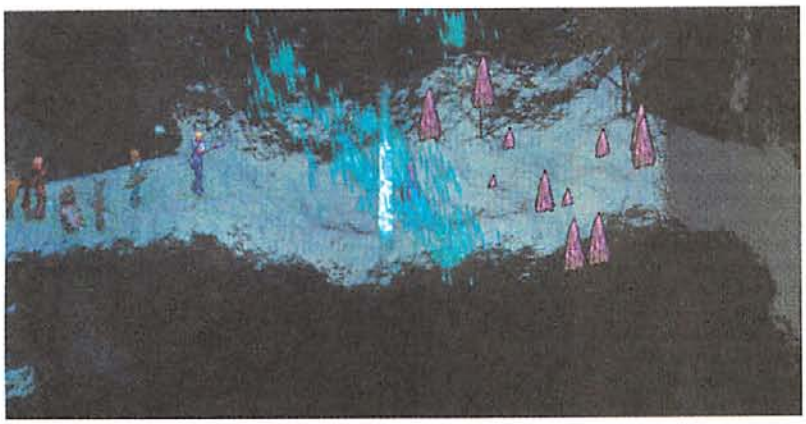
A druid's elemental shape-changing abilities are nifty simply for sheer melee damage, but they are also useful for one other tactic. If you want to prevent quick monsters from sneaking past your front line and into your party, place your elemental druid at the front of the pack. With assistance, he or she will often be able to block the passage of sneaky enemies headed for your party mage.

MAGE

Many of the mage's new spells are small-focus offensive spells. Use them in the same way you would use spells like Magic Missile and Flame Arrow, but watch out for incidental damage. Both Mordenkainen's Force Missiles and Vitriolic Sphere can add a powerful punch to long-range caster battles. For relentless assaults on enemies, have your mages and bards cast Magic Missile and Mordenkainen's Force Missiles, with a slight delay between each character's action. As each missile hits, the enemy will take damage and take a moment to reel from the blow. This can effectively prevent an enemy from doing anything for a number of rounds—assuming that the sheer volume of damage doesn't annihilate them.

If you've ever wanted to cast Lightning Bolt but were afraid of the rebound, use Lance of Disruption for a more subdued effect. It does bludgeoning damage, so it can dish out full damage even against creatures that are resistant to electricity.

A number of high-level spells can turn your mage into a little combat machine. You still have to worry about his or her THACO, but in terms of damage potential and the ability to stay in a fight, the mage should be quite happy. In those instances when you need another front-line fighter, buff your mage with spells like Trollish Fortitude and either Iron Body or Tenser's Transformation. The latter is best used with a multiclassed fighter/mage or cleric/mage, as the resulting hit points will be astounding. CGW



MIND FIELD With Cloudburst, Spike Stones, and Wall of Moonlight active, you have yourself a nice undead-slaying corridor.



Worms World Party

Be a smooth annelid with these tips

by Thierry Nguyen

With factors such as wind, position, and supply, WORMS WORLD PARTY turns out to be a lot more complicated than the traditional "aim nozzle somewhere in general vicinity of enemy and fire." With so many darn missions to consider, I went straight to the development team to see if they had any words of wisdom, both general and specific. Here's a rundown of their general tips, followed by some specific multiplayer-mission strategies.

WORMS ALL OVER

The key to success is developing a strategy and implementing it: Don't just set off and hope everything will turn out okay because if you do, you'll have problems. A plan can take the form of a broad idea at the start of the battle but more often it governs the specific move available immediately. When your turn starts, spend five seconds (if the turn time allows) evaluating the situation. Target a worm (or group of worms) and calculate the best place to be to cause maximum damage on the enemy. Make sure that you can be in a safe place when you've finished your move. Make your way there quickly and allow time to line up your shot and fire. Then, using the few seconds of retreat time, get your worm to that safe place you spied earlier.

■ Remember the hot-keys for all the weapons and fuse times, because it's a lot quicker than using the Weapon Panel.

■ Set off landmines close to enemy worms—this will get you a "free shot" and knock some damage from them.

■ Sheep, skunks, Sally Army, moles, and old women can all collect crates.

■ Weapon, utility, and health crates can explode much like oil drums, but they can't be set off by fire like oil drums.

■ It's quicker to drown a worm than to hit it with an actual weapon. In the cavern levels, you can still knock enemy worms off the side of the screen.

■ Girders can not only protect you, but also block your opponent in.

■ Keep track of the weapons your opponent's been using, so that you can figure out what he's got left.

■ Keep the remaining round time in mind so that you can prepare for Sudden Death when the time comes.

■ Try combining utilities with weapons. For example, use Low Gravity combined with Firepunch or the baseball bat for a fast, lethal strike. Use Double-Damage with spread-fire weapons, like the cluster bomb or the mortar.

TEAM CURLY

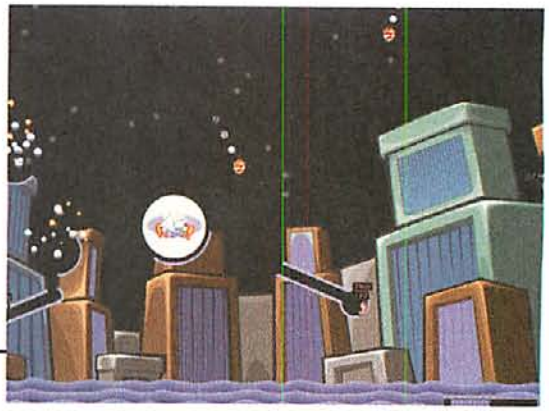
Here are some tips on some of the multiplayer missions in WORMS, which should help give you a foundation for figuring out the missions, whether they're cooperative or antagonistic.

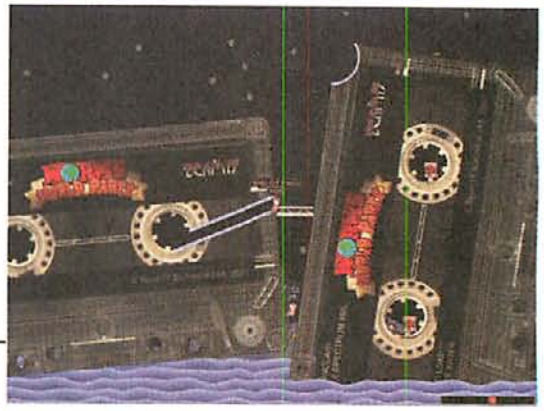
■ **MISSION 6: ARMAGEDDON DUG-IN** Don't use your shotguns to hit the enemy; use them as substitute blowtorches when you run out of the real thing. Use the Ninja rope to get close to the bottom, then blowtorch your way in. Use the landscape until it gets whittled away by the meteorites, then break out the girders when there's hardly any land left.

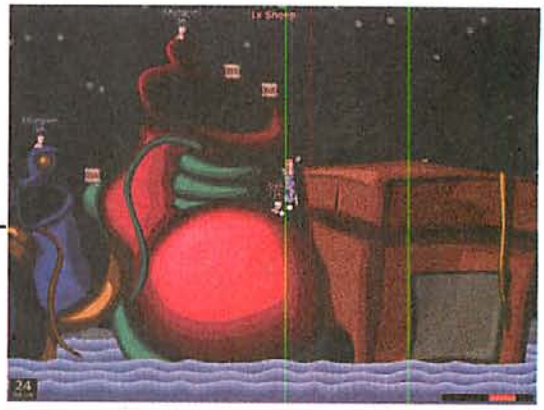
■ **MISSION 9: MAKE THE EARTH MOVE** When playing as the attacker, don't try to blowtorch right to the crate; you don't have enough blowtorches. Instead, use the girders to scale the middle cassette, reach the top, and use the pneumatic drill to reach the crate and win the match.

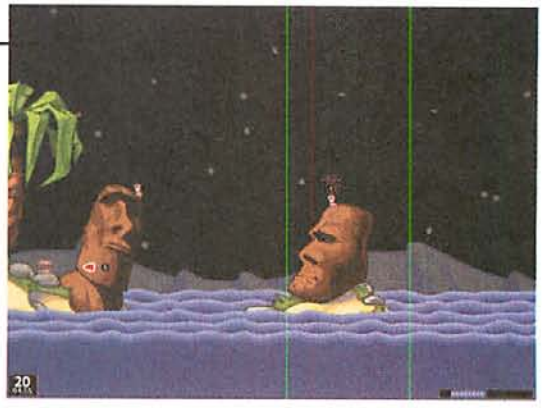
■ **MISSION 11: DO YOU LIKE MY SHOES?** This co-op mission has a simple goal: Kill all enemy worms. Stand on the second worm's hand and use the Firepunch to break out and collect the crate. Put one player/worm on the left side and the other on the right. Split the workload by having each one take out two enemy worms.

■ **MISSION 15: CHANCE TO BUY AN ISLAND** You're aiming to destroy the target that appears on skull island on the right. With the first worm, jetpack over to the left island and grab the crate. The second worm should use the laser sight and longbow to shoot the mine off the tree. The first worm can now use Low Gravity to flip over and snag the crate near the aforementioned tree. Leave the second worm alone for now. Have the first worm use the jetpack, girders, and Low Gravity to snag more crates. The target will eventually appear, and you can then have the second worm use newly acquired weapons to destroy it.









Patches

Counter-Strike: Mostly to fix the bug that makes the retail version of Counter-Strike conflict with the new maps and consequently, not run at all. If your original install is from an Internet download, you don't need this. But if you're using the Counter-Strike box you got from the store, you might want to look into this patch.

MechWarrior 4: Big, big change to multiplayer: The server host can kick, and even ban, the more annoying players in a match. Also, games can run for much longer times (the timer can be set between 90 and 120 minutes now); a fix for the Speed Hack has been made; and if you want to cancel a connection (instead of waiting for Mech 4 to do it for you), now you can.

Space Empires IV: Quite a few interface tweaks made here—notably, the addition of a Move Ten option when shuffling units and cargo around. Otherwise, this patch is mostly fixing what was annoying before (such as trying to scrap or retrofit multiple ships).

Majesty: Ever tried launching a multiplayer game outside of the Internet Gaming Zone, only to have it crash on you? Fear that incident no more—this patch will fix the game so that you can use any gaming service (such as GameSpy) to launch a game.

Giants: What didn't change? Bugs involving the camera, bugs involving building certain structures, and mouse-sensitivity issues were all fixed in the single-player portion. The multiplayer portion has gone through balancing, and also sports two new Defensive modes of play.

Readers' Tips

Readers blaze through Baldur's Gate II

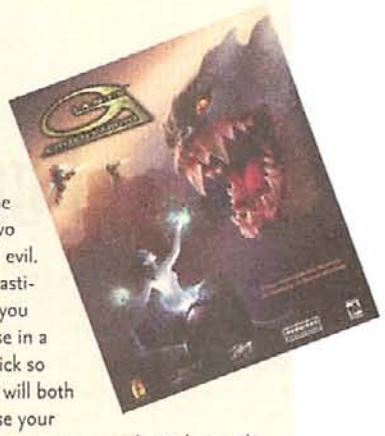
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn

This is a very useful tip for killing annoying enemies (such as dragons) in Baldur's Gate II. First, have your priests (or rangers or paladins if they can) memorize a couple Doom spells. In addition, have your mages memorize Greater Malison. Throw as many of these spells as possible at your target. Hit your target with multiple Chromatic Orbs to boot, because if your mages are at level 12 or higher, the target creature must make a saving throw or be instantly killed. This trick works best when there's a single enemy. You can also try Minor Spell Sequencer, and launch multiple Chromatic Orbs in the same round. I've successfully killed the Shadow Dragon and the Red Dragon with this spell. **-Neil Rittenhouse**

I found this tip on my third run through Baldur's Gate II, as a mage this time. When you're in the giant Planar Sphere (you need Valygar) you find the three Solamnic Knights. They'll ask you to help them get out. Go to Ribald, and pay him the money for the mage to transport them home. When she arrives in the main area with the Knights, talk to her, and you get 45,000 XP and a golden girdle. However, my trick is: After you get the circlet, she'll start to cast a spell. If you're quick, you can talk to her again and get another 45,000 XP and another girdle! You can do this infinite times if she doesn't ever get far in the spell. I had a big pile of girdles lying there after a while. The best part is, it's not really cheating! The designers obviously wanted players to do this, or they would have fixed it, so your gaming conscience can rest assured. **-Kris Kieraszewicz**

I found an awesome tactic for Baldur's Gate II. The Slayer is immune to almost everything; this means that nothing can hit it. It also has five attacks per round, which is almost obscene; those attacks can also hit anything because of its THACO. On top of that, it's immune to Imprisonment. You don't need any of those other fancy tactics or spells when going against the demilich. Just kill the lich with traps, Sunray, Bolt of Glory, and anything else good against liches (also, the Ring of the Ram does a full 30 points of damage). After you kill the lich, move everybody else away so they don't get hit with Imprisonment, turn into the Slayer, and let it rip. The demilich should be dead in about 15 seconds. Just be sure your reputation is pretty high, and do this quickly, since you'll lose two reputation points and you may die just from being the Slayer for too long. This also works against any other seemingly unbeatable enemies or groups of enemies. **-Matthew Bedford**

Thanks to Matthew's tip, some of us might finally be able to finish the game. His slaying advice nets him copies of Shadowman and Soulbringer. Enjoy!



Readers! There is a new feature being added to CGW Tips, one with an emphasis on two things: multiplayer and evil. We're looking for the nastiest, most devious trick you can come up with to use in a multiplayer match. A trick so fraught with evil that it will both ensure victory and cause your opponent to curse your name in anguish. Each month, the contributor will get an honest-to-god good game from us. Next month's winner gets a free copy of Giants: Citizen Kabuto.

Dirty Trick of the Month

The response to the call for dirty tricks was amazing. Several people took a cue from Red Alert 2, and submitted detailed tactics that wrung maximum humiliation from their human opponents. Others wrote in with dirty tricks for games like GTA 2, MechWarrior 4, and even Crimson Skies. But the prize this month goes to a trick for one of the oldest yet most persistent online games around: Ultima Online. With the sequel canceled, here's one last thing for people to try before they decide to cancel their accounts:

"One of the things I really hated about Ultima Online was the constant barrage of Player-Killers. So once I got killed, the first thing I would do was try to talk to them. Usually their arrogance would have them spout off some sort of freshman-level insult. I'd reply with only OOHHH OOOHHH (that's what you see if you're not smart enough to talk with the dead). Then I would head off to the closest healer and get resurrected. I'd then train as many animals as I could find. Afterward, I'd go find my enemy (hopefully in town) and then have the dogs, chickens, goats, pigs, and cats guard that person, making for a miniature Noah's Ark. It's great to watch for hours as some poor schmuck runs all over town, trying to lose his new friends. The best part was, if they got tired and killed the pets, the town guards would quickly come in and dispatch them." –Ken Hinkle

Thanks, Ken, for giving us the best way to get revenge on a PK. We're not sure which is more humiliating, getting killed by your victim or getting killed by a herd of animals trained by your victim. Red Alert 2: Collector's Edition is yours.

Send us your tips

Send your tips, tricks, and strategies to
CGW_LETTERS@ZIFFDAVIS.COM
(please put CGTIPS in the subject line).
We'll publish three submissions each month. Please send genuine tips or strategies instead of cheat codes cut-and-pasted from the Internet.
One winner will get something pulled at random from the
Computer Gaming World BozoBin©!

Easter Eggs

Game: Clive Barker's Undying

There are several Easter eggs in Undying. Here's what the development team had to say about finding them:

Shooting Gallery

- Begin the game, walk into the house, and get the short tour from the maid.
- Afterward, walk to the end of the hall, toward the door near which there lies a health pack.
- Shoot the two square panels near the top of the door.
- The door should open, and inside you'll be treated to a 10-level mini shooting gallery. It's pretty hard, since the team focused more on balancing the game than on the Easter eggs.



Miniature Theater

- Hit [Tab] to get the console.
- Type in "Open Manor_EntranceHall_FromKitch".
- Head toward the paintings on your left.
- Jump, and try to reach the top of the two outermost paintings. They'll become slightly recessed and you will hear a click when you're successful.
- Watch the show!

Giant Sheep

- Open the console.
- Type in "Open Monastery_Present_Cove".
- Play through the level until you have jumped into the ruined building (from the barn).
- Head to the upper level of this building.
- Look for a plank that is extended toward the farm (this is where some howlers were jumping around when you first got into the building).
- Jump up and down at the end of the plank a few times, and you'll see our version of the StayPuff Marshmallow Man.

Disco of Death

- Open the console again.
- Type "Open Oneiros_HowlingWell".
- Fly up to the big building. Walk in, then down the stairs. Look for a square button on the wall (near the big purple magic field thingy). Push it.
- Go back outside. Fly up onto the roof of the building and scrye. Look for a small purple haze, and fly toward it.
- Get your groove on.

Patrick strikes out

- Open the console yet again.
- Type "Open Manor_EntranceHall_night_ReturnFromCove" (the longest level name yet).
- Walk through the first set of doors, and hang a left. A maid will come out.
- After you've talked to her, follow her and hang around for a bit. Guess Patrick ain't as smooth as Duke Nukem.

CGW Tips



Clive Barker's Undying

Press [Tab] to open a chat window, then type any of the following codes:

eh God Mode
slomo # Increase Speed of the Game (# = 1–5)
addall Get All Weapons and Spells
set aeons.patrick health 999 Add 999 to Health
set aeons.patrick mana 999 Add 999 to Mana
AmpAttSpell Increase Level of Selected Spell
assall Create Donkey
infiniteMana 1 Unlimited Mana (0=Off)
becomeLight 1 Gives Light (0=Off)
flight Activates Flight Mode
behindview 1 Third-Person View

Fighting Bosses with Cheat Codes: If the game detects you having a health over 100, the bosses won't attack. Since you must exploit weaknesses during their attack, you can't go on. Use the health cheat to set your health back to 100 before confronting them.

Star Wars: Battle for Naboo

Go to Options/Passcodes and use the codes from the list (you will hear a short click if the cheat was accepted).

JHGNRGAS Access All Levels
FMRYLDAD Dark Side Level
EOWXZGAS Team Photo
DIWMZIAR Show Credits
HRDTOKIL Advanced Shields
RQORACAQ Access AAT
LFZWKXAA Unlimited Lives
XFIIYBAY SwampSpeeder
JOBXXFAI Art Gallery
RECTVBAH Concert Hall
CXSJMIAA Single Shot Kills

The Moon Project

Type these codes during the game:

Cheater 1 Activate Cheat Mode
MyBrainIsFaster 1 Fast Research
Limit_Up # Increase Units Limit to #
MoneyForNothing # Increase Money to #
ByeBye Lose Scenario
Shower Lightning Rain
Beautifulmoon 1 Show Map
Hotground Place Mines
GoHome! Destroys Your Selected Building
Smash Destroys Selected Enemy Building
JudgementDay Destroys All Enemies in View
ScienceForNothing Free Research
HereYouAre! Shows All Enemies in View
Hide Replaces Fog of War in View
Moonlight Removes Fog of War in View
NobelPrize Research Everything
Tromaville Damages All Visible Enemies



Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter

Press [Ctrl] + [Tab] to display the console window and then enter the following codes:

GETYOURCHEATON:ExploreArea(): Show full map
GETYOURCHEATON:Hans(): Teleport party to pointer
GETYOURCHEATON:SetCurrentXP([number]): Give selected characters indicated XP
GETYOURCHEATON:AddGold([number]): Add indicated gold to party total
GETYOURCHEATON:Midas(): Add 500 gold to party total
GETYOURCHEATON:FirstAid(): five healing potions , five antidotes, and one Scroll of Stone to Flesh

Note: Back up the original files before proceeding with the following set of codes.

Use a text editor to edit the icewind.ini file in the game directory. Add the line **"Cheats=1"** under the **"[Game Options]"** section. Start the game and press [Ctrl] + [Tab] to display the console window. Type **"GETYOURCHEATON:EnableCheatKeys();"** (case sensitive) to enable cheat mode. Then enter one of the following codes while playing a game:

[Ctrl] + J Move selected characters to pointer position
[Ctrl] + R Heal or resurrect the selected character or portrait
[Ctrl] + Y Kill selected monster or NPC with no EXP
[Ctrl] + 4 Display trigger polygons (shows traps)

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

If you miss it, you'll never forgive yourself. On newsstands June 4

INSIDE TACTICAL SIMULATIONS

by Raphael "SF Commando" Liberatore • rlconan@aol.com

Defining Intensity

The intangible that every good tactical simulation should possess

As someone who spent years doing this stuff in real life, I'm often asked about what defines a good tactical simulation game. There are many factors to consider, such as tactics, weapons, ballistic characteristics, real-world environments, decent AI, and of course, realism. If a developer hastily slaps these elements together, or glosses over one or more of them during the development, the game will be bolo. And tactical sim fans are not as forgiving as players of other genres if a game is lacking. However, as important as the above factors are in defining a good tactical sim, intensity, for me, defines the genre.

Intensity is what makes the combat model of a computer game "feel" real. Intensity also bridges the gap between real-world situations and computer action. So how am I qualifying intensity? I'm looking at it from an emotional standpoint—how you feel while playing a tactical simulation. That's why games like ROGUE SPEAR and SWAT 3 are considered benchmarks by the tac-sim crowd; both games bring out intensity at many levels. Take the airport mission in ROGUE SPEAR. Not only do you plan every detail of a heart-pounding hostage rescue mission, but you also have to strategically equip and position your operatives—snipers, observers, and two to three teams of assaulters—in order to take down terrorists and rescue hostages without losing men. One false move, and both hostages and operatives get hosed. The same can be said of real-world missions: Intensity drives the operation, whether it's in the jungles of Central America, the streets of Mogadishu, or the Kurdish mountains. When the developer gets it right, intensity defines the genre. CGW

S.W.A.T.

Sierra's Rod Fung on

CGW got to chat with the Sierra Studios producer Rod Fung about his experience with the Los Angeles Police Department SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) team and how that experience is reflected in SWAT 3 ELITE EDITION.

You spent a lot of time around LAPD SWAT officers: How much did this influence SWAT 3's realism? How much did you learn about SWAT tactics, and how were they applied in the game?

Our association with LAPD SWAT pretty much influenced everything we did in the game. We learned an incredible amount of tactics and SOPs (standard operating procedures) from LAPD SWAT. All of us came to really appreciate the job that SWAT does. It was of utmost importance to us that we represented LAPD SWAT in the best light, and we did our best to accomplish that. We wanted to feature SWAT as a life-saving organization, and thus the game went in that direction. Most of the realism in the game came about not from any one encounter that we had with SWAT, but from an accumulation of encounters and stories they told us. I found out that if you hang out with them long enough, you learn a lot about how the team functions and operates. A side result of hanging out with SWAT is that you start talking and acting like them as well. If I had to sum up LAPD SWAT in one sentence, I'd say that they are a group of highly trained and motivated individuals who are very good at what they do. We are proud to be associated with them.

Which SWAT tactic gives you a rush?

That's really difficult to say, as we've been fortunate to see them use various tactics in different situations. In the past seven years, we've been invited to Los Angeles on numerous occasions to observe and meet with the team. One memorable experience was when LAPD invited us to observe an exercise as trailing members of a stack of 15 SWAT officers who were about to make an entry. The mission was a hostage rescue situation; the location was in a downtown Los Angeles high rise. We made entry into a pitch-black abandoned building, and used stealth-to-breach tactics as we serpentinely moved through it. For about two hours, we cleared the building up to a designated breach point in the basement.

> **"...an assaulter stepped up with a breaching shotgun and took out the door lock."**

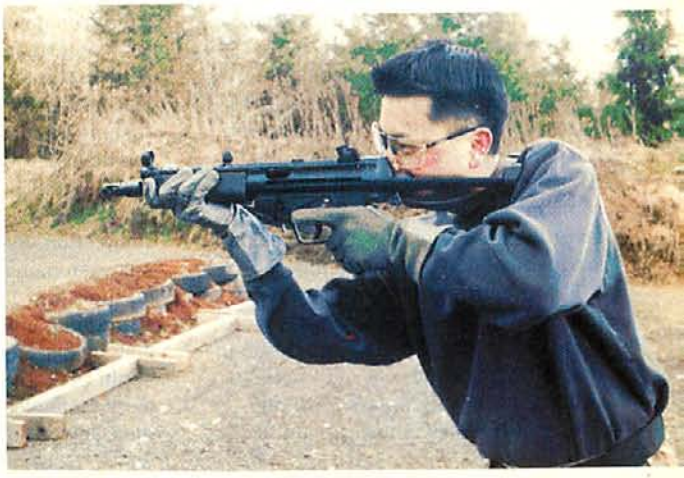
The entire team stacked at the designated door, and an assaulter stepped up with a breaching shotgun and took out the door lock. The door was opened and the dynamic entry began. The door opened up into a long, L-shaped room with multiple closed doors and corridors leading off it. The team tossed flashbangs into every door and cleared every room along the way. Bad guy targets were engaged and the stack moved quickly through the rooms, clearing the area and saving the hostage. This was a great opportunity to watch LAPD SWAT first-hand; it gave us a good impression of what an actual call-out is like. We were able to film the entire exercise and we've used this footage as reference material on a number of occasions.

What is your favorite item of SWAT gear and why? And tell us about your experience firing weapons like the MP5.

My favorite SWAT gear item probably has to be the HK MP5. Part of the reason that I make games in this genre is that I am very interested in this subject matter. Before I worked on the SWAT team, I really had never encountered an MP5. Sure, I had seen MP5s in the movies, and knew a bit about them, but after spending considerable time with LAPD SWAT and getting hands-on time behind one, I've really come to appreciate the MP5 weapons system from an operator's standpoint. Probably my favorite setup is an MP5 with a Navy trigger group and an A2 fixed stock.

If you were a member of the SWAT unit involved in the L.A. Hospital crisis operation, which SWAT character model (Assaulter, Operator, Guardian, Enforcer, Raider, and so on) best fits your modus operandi? What position in the element do you hold?

I definitely think I would be best as an Assaulter. I have no problem having an element leader tell me what to do...I just need to know when and where they want me! If I happen to be assigned to the red team and I've been designated to be the first through a door entry, I'll enter quickly, run my wall, clear my designated area, and engage a target if necessary. As my LAPD SWAT advisor always tells me about tactics...it's all really pretty simple stuff. CGW



FIELD EXPERIENCE Rod Fung, SWAT 3 producer, steps away from the PC to get some hands-on firearm experience.

by Thomas L. McDonald • cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

Lineage: The Korean Factor

Is this the world's most popular MMORPG?

I had my first inkling that Koreans can be very intense gamers a couple of years ago when I learned that much of the population of South Korea was hopelessly addicted to STARCRAFT. So it didn't come as a complete surprise to hear that MMORPGs (massively multiplayer, online role-playing games) were not just the rage in Korea, but a full-bore crack-like obsession. This is all the more shocking when you consider that the home PC does not have what marketing folks (and Ron Jeremy) call "heavy penetration" in Southeast Asia. Gamers thereabouts often flock to cybercafes to satiate that pixel jones, while in America we hang a Cybercafe sign on a building only until the Out of Business sign gets back from the printer. The game that South Koreans are currently stuffing into their bongs while madly flicking their lighters is an RPG from NC Interactive called LINEAGE: THE BLOODPLEDGE.

I had a chance to play a bit of LINEAGE, and you will too if you go to **lineagethebloodpledge.com** during the open beta test. It's an okay 2D top-down RPG from the old school, kind of like ULTIMA ONLINE before the millions of dollars' worth of testing and infrastructure. Since NC Interactive is unlikely to undertake millions of dollars worth of testing and infrastructure, I will leave the game's relative merits to your imagination. It does, however, look just fine and has some interesting conventions, my favorite being a lot of people speaking languages I don't understand.

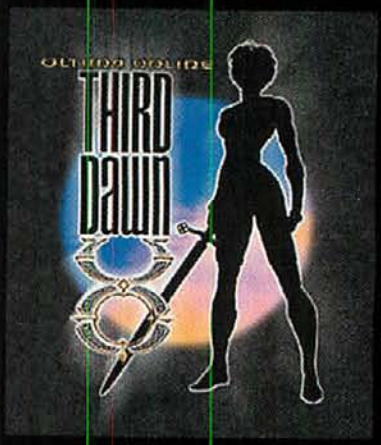
The qualities of LINEAGE are neither here nor there (well, a little more there than here). The real mind-hump comes from the number of registered subscribers being reported: 10 million, with 140,000 simultaneous players on average. Though initially I was dubious, I'm going to assume those numbers are true since a) *CGW* Editor Ken Brown tells me that Koreans are really into gaming, and b) I won't have a column otherwise.

To try to fit the numbers into your brain pan, you must understand that Sony's EVERQUEST—far and away the most popular American MMORPG—has 350,000 registered users, and the company nearly wet itself with joy when it hit a 90,000 simultaneous-user peak. In other words, South Korea—a considerably smaller, less prosperous, and ostensibly less computer-centric country—is kicking our online gaming ass by a ratio of 3 to 1.

And this is with a majority of the gamers playing in cybercafes! This is going to have a ripple effect on American games and gamers. U.S. companies have already massed servers throughout Asia, particularly in Korea, and Asian developers are rushing out online product to cash in. We have yet to see what Phase II of the MMORPG genre will be like, since only SHADOWBANE is truly close to completion. Even if the U.S. market for next-gen games is soft, Asia will pick up the slack. The future for dozens of struggling, independent online games may be getting a bit rosier, and Korea might give the world something even more technologically profound than the Daewoo Joyster. CGW



LINEAGE: THE BLOODPLEDGE Can 10 million registered subscribers be wrong? Can there really be 10 million registered subscribers?



A Few Good Utes: ULTIMA ONLINE

With ULTIMA ONLINE: THIRD DAWN now finished, it seems like a good time to look at a few good utilities for classic UO. They can be found at uo.stratics.com.

UO Curse Tool:

Newly updated, this little tool from Xena allows you to quickly hurl custom pseudo-Victorian insults at people.

UO Magic Tool:

Another Xena ute freshly updated for THIRD DAWN, this tool tracks usage-reagent usage, as well as the number of spells that can be cast with those reagents.

UO Assist:

Available from tugsoft.com, this is probably the most comprehensive tool available for UO. It creates shortcuts to useful functions such as arm/disarm, counts resources, attempts to reveal hidden power words, and more. Really quite useful.

UOHomeowner:

Brings the power of THE SIMS to decorating and managing your home, sort of. Allows you to handle items and ban people.

UOTamer:

Makes issuing commands to animals much easier.

UO Auto Map:

An essential navigation and orientation tool: a scalable, detailed, customizable map utility.

by Tom Price • tom_price@ziffdavis.com

Too Real

CGW editor gets more than he bargained for at Daytona 500

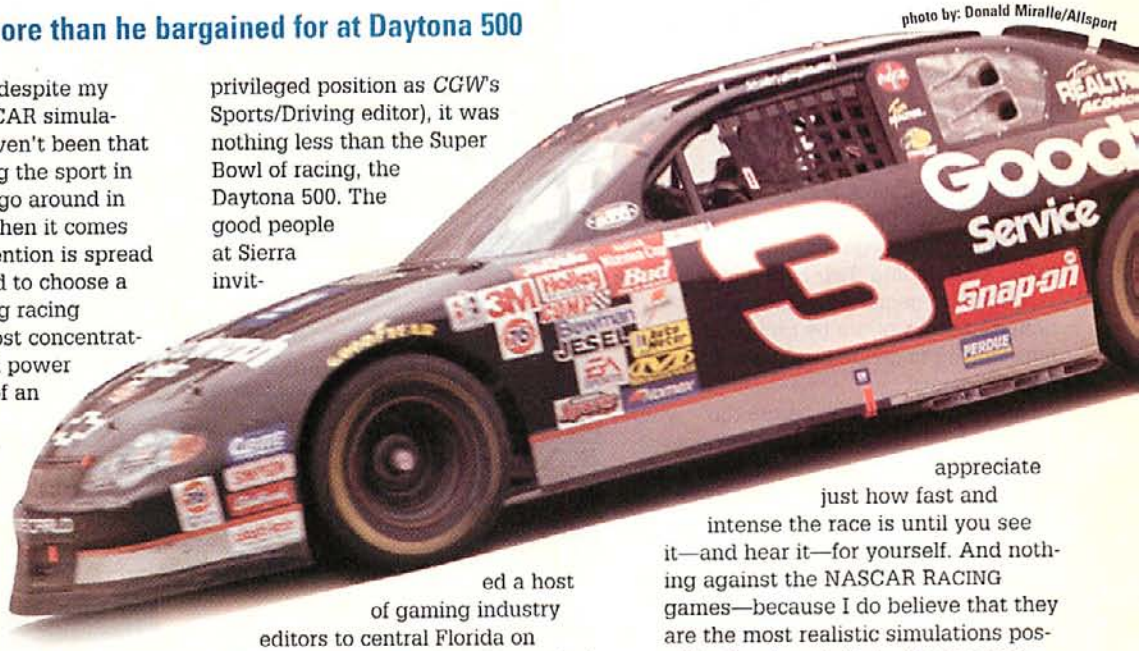


photo by: Donald Miralle/Allsport

I hate to admit it, but despite my enthusiasm for NASCAR simulations on the PC, I haven't been that fanatical about following the sport in real life. Watching cars go around in circles seems boring. When it comes to motor sports, my attention is spread around a bit, but if I had to choose a favorite it would be drag racing because it offers the most concentrated display of speed and power I've ever seen outside of an aircraft carrier launch, and because it was my father's hobby and he used to take me to the drags at Sears Point when I was growing up. Ever since, I've loved American racing culture, from the burning rubber and nitro methane fumes to the mullets and beer bellies.

When I finally got to experience NASCAR first-hand (thanks to my privileged position as *CGW*'s Sports/Driving editor), it was nothing less than the Super Bowl of racing, the Daytona 500. The good people at Sierra invited a host of gaming industry editors to central Florida on February 18 for the "official" launch of NASCAR RACING 4. And I have to tell you; whatever it was that I wasn't getting, I get it now.

First of all, television doesn't do it appreciate just how fast and intense the race is until you see it—and hear it—for yourself. And nothing against the NASCAR RACING games—because I do believe that they are the most realistic simulations possible, thanks wholly to the fanatical dedication of the Papyrus team—but games can't (yet) replicate that intangible X factor that opened my eyes to the sport. I now feel closer to understanding what drives its fans to levels of devotion that put other sports (even pro football and baseball) to shame. Watching the Daytona 500 in person left me hooked. I just wished I had a driver to follow, a number to wear on a hat or shirt to let other NASCAR fans know that I was one of them.

On the bus back to the hotel in Orlando, faces burning and ears ringing, one of the Papyrus guys got a call on his cell phone from his roommate. Dale Earnhardt had died.

Considering how many people I saw wearing number 3 logos that day, and how the cheers when his name was announced during driver introductions were as loud as the boos for pretty-boy Jeff Gordon, I wondered if the sport would lose fans.

Then I thought, even if it does (which it won't) it gained one in me, and probably in all the others among that crowd of 250,000 people at Daytona who were attending their first-ever NASCAR event.

I also know what number I'll be wearing from now on. CGW

What's up with MOTOR CITY?

Rumors of cancellation have been swirling about Electronic Arts' ambitious persistent online racing world due to the lack of new information. But fear not, grease monkeys and monkettes. MOTOR CITY ONLINE is coming along nicely, and should go live on EA.com this summer.

The basic game engine is complete, with a good deal of the original NEED FOR SPEED graphical code in place, plus a new four-point physics engine. What the gearheads at EA are working on now is the front-end stuff: the economy, the car and equipment setups, the online community options, and so on. Probably the most intriguing addition to MCO since we last updated you is clubs.



Clubs in MCO are analogous to clans in action and strategy games, but they're more involved than three letters in a bracket at the beginning of your player name. They're officially sanctioned parts of the game, and any driver at level 10 and above will be allowed to create one. You can create a club around anything: Mustangs Only, Chevy Lovers, Mechanics Only. Clubs can also gain "turf" by regularly winning at a particular track.

What's the advantage? Well, if you're a club president, your members pay a small fee to you, and you get a percentage of all winnings. It's your choice to hoard that money, give it to your club treasurer, use it to buy more and better parts, or simply redistribute it among your members. It's just what MCO needs to set it apart from other racing games and to make it a fully fledged online world.

by Audrey Wells • gamedame@gddomain.com

Are Fan Games Legal?

An inside look at the world of fan-created games

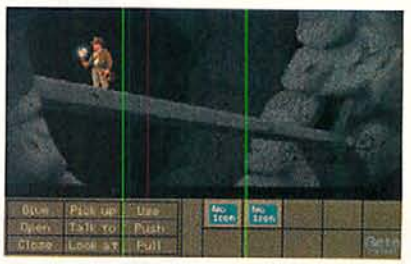
Do you think the only place to find your favorite adventure game characters—such as Guybrush Threepwood, Indiana Jones, and Zak McKracken—is in the commercial games released by big companies like LucasArts? Well, some fans who couldn't get enough have taken matters into their own hands by creating "fan games." Fan games are nonprofit projects run by groups of fans looking to create sequels to their favorite games.

Last August, not long before the release of ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND, LucasArts shut down two fan projects called THE FATE OF MONKEY ISLAND and LEGENDS OF LECHUCK (anyone with a brain can still find copies of them floating around the Internet, though). Despite the fact that fan games like these use copyrighted material, the fans claim protection under Section 107 of Title 17 of the U.S. code. To sum up a bunch of legal nonsense, this section basically states that "fair use" of copyrighted material for preferably nonprofit purposes—including criticism, comment, and research—is not an infringement of copyright law.

Regardless of whether fan games fit the criteria for fair use, it is clear to me that these games are produced only for personal and uncompensated enjoyment—what's the harm in that? I can perfectly understand that LucasArts has every legal right to shut down these projects, especially when the fan games involve copyrighted material that is still in use by games such as ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND. But a backlash against this legal action is building. Infuriated fans have started petitions and are even threatening boycotts.



THE ORIGINAL FATE OF ATLANTIS... LucasArts' spectacular 1992 adventure game made fans clamor for more.



...AND THE UNAUTHORIZED SEQUEL When LucasArts didn't deliver, fans started their own sequel to FOA.

> **"Some fans...have taken matters into their own hands by creating 'fan games.'"**

On the positive side, LucasArts has not yet pulled the plug on two prominent fan projects known as ZAK MCKRACKEN 2 (**zak2.adventuregamer.com**) and FATE OF ATLANTIS II (**indyproject.de** or **http://206.96.221.58/**). However, it's too early to say what LucasArts will do in the end, since both of these games are still in development. The two MONKEY ISLAND-based projects were completed and available for download before LucasArts took action. I'd like to believe that one of my favorite companies wouldn't let its devoted fans slave away for years on these projects and then shut them down. What a waste of creative energy and talent. Nonetheless, both ZAK2 and FATE OF ATLANTIS II continue development and look fabulous, even though the teams that work on them in their spare time are spread across the globe.

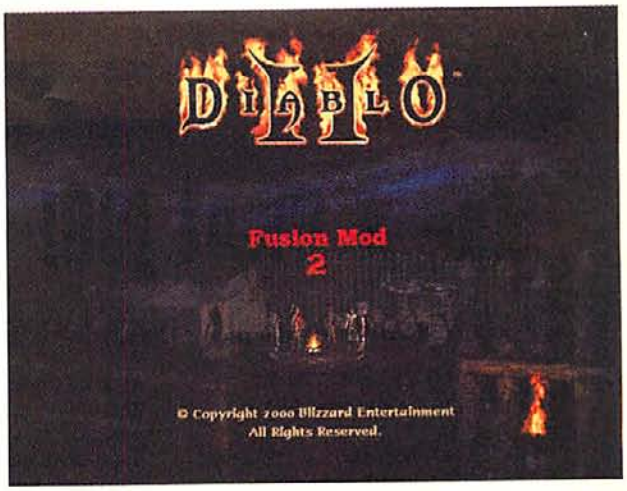
FOA2 is based on LucasArts' immensely popular 1992 game, INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS, while ZAK2 is based on ZAK MCKRACKEN AND THE ALIEN MINDBENDERS, a 1988 LucasArts game that featured a tabloid reporter named Zak who uncovers an alien plot to stupefy the human race. With the help of three other characters, you travel to diverse locations such as Peru and Mars, meet two-headed squirrels, talk to yaks, and somehow manage to save the world from alien takeover.

Both of these fan-made sequels borrow heavily from the originals, but it's obvious that a lot of time and hard work has gone into them—it'd be a shame to see them shut down this late in development. Hey LucasArts, you know the saying "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery"? Live and let live already. It's all in good fun. CGW

by T. Byrl Baker • tbyrlbaker@msn.com

Hell Warmed Over

DIABLO II gets new life with an awesome free mod



FUSION FOR DIABLO II This is the only graphical indication that Fusion is lurking behind the scenes, but the gameplay changes are far less subtle.

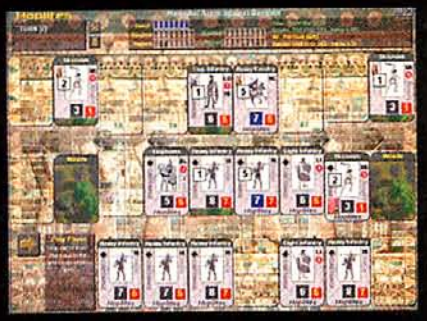
I considered DIABLO II a letdown, but despite its low-res graphics and repetitive gameplay, it's become something of a Pavlovian pastime. Since I can't stop clicking, I'm always searching for patches that at least let me thoroughly enjoy the time I waste playing it. For months I looked at various versions of the popular Fusion Mod from Jarda Fireheart & Co. (**www.phrozenkeep.com/~tactics**), but it always had too many caveats to be trusted. Many of the original designers were forced to give up after version 1.5 because the real world caught up with them, but Jarda kept plugging away, expanding its features and honing the overall balance of the game. Finally, with the 2.5 release, we have a mod truly worthy of a DIABLO fanatic's time.

Fusion 2.5 reworks nearly every aspect of DIABLO II's gameplay, making it more challenging but also more rewarding. Monsters—especially bosses—have been transformed from heavy bags into badasses that are harder to hit. To offset this, they tend to drop better stuff more often and also have a much tougher time hitting you if your armor and other defensive ratings are high.

Be prepared for a shock when you pick up magic, unique, or set items in the game, as the stats for all of them have changed dramatically. For the most part these special items have been toned down, and there are enough new items to collect that Fusion 2.5 had me clicking into the wee hours of the morning for a solid week. Socketed items are now highly desirable because gem attributes have been seriously pumped up. An item fitted completely with perfect gems is more powerful than most of the unique items in the game.

Perhaps the best addition is what the designers have termed an Exceptional Set for each character class, like the paladin's Full Armor of God or the barbarian's Vengeance of the North. These imbue special powers that go far beyond the standard sets, although they also appear in the game. More than a dozen new unique items have been added, and many have drawbacks that users must accept if they want to gain some incredible benefits. Take Isuldur's Bane, for example, which is a ring that adds 125-150 fire damage, a 200 percent better chance of finding a magic item, and 200 percent more gold when monsters drop it, as well as +20 to strength and +4 to all skills. Sounds great until you see that all this comes at the expense of -120 to your replenish life stat, -150 to your mana, +250 percent to your target's defense rating, and an additional 25 percent damage taken by your character each time a monster lands a hit.

One of the worst aspects of DIABLO II is that once a character reaches levels in the mid-twenties, leveling up becomes slow and tedious. The fact that the effectiveness of skills either tapers off sharply or becomes ridiculously enhanced (can you say "Whirlwind"?) compounds the problem. Fusion 2.5 changes all that; levels are attained at a near-constant pace and the skills are evened out—at last it's possible to invest points in formerly weak skills without worrying about wasting them. Fusion 2.5 makes a good game great, and you can't ask much more from a free download. CGW



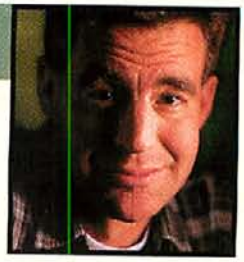
HUZZAH FOR HOPLITES This battle in the woods isn't going too well for the Samnites.

I'll see your heavy cavalry and raise you a war elephant

If you like wargames and haven't heard about HOPLITES yet, make haste to www.digilander.iol.it/zak965. HOPLITES is a card game based on *SPQR*, an old boardgame from GMT Games designed to simulate battles that took place during the time of the ancient Roman Republic. This take on the game models more than 40 army types from the period, ranging from the Carthaginians and the Persians to the Macedonians and Romans—and everything in between. A complete army editor is included in case that isn't enough for you, and a complete Samurai conversion is also available at the site.

The game plays out in phased turns, and the deceptively simple mechanics allow for some complex tactics and sneaky tricks. It incorporates leadership ratings, terrain modifiers, and other variables that really add to its tactical depth. HOPLITES is already polished to near-perfection, and just keeps getting better. Best of all, it's free, tiny, and doesn't require installation, making it a perfect laptop diversion.

by Jeff Gr33n



/Me---> OwnZ jOO!

Old Man Green takes on COUNTER-STRIKE, and dies

"Dude, let's play COUNTER-STRIKE," says one editor.

"Yeah dude," says another, "Enough with the EVERQUEST already. How can you even play that thing?"

The two *CGW* editors are in my office, bothering me as I practice my dwarf paladin's tailoring skills. I wish they would go away.

"Go away," I say.

"Dude," says the first, "Come on. COUNTER-STRIKE is the number one game on the Internet. Get with it."

"Hey—I am 'with it'," I say, defensively. "All of your bases are belonging to us!"

The two editors roll their eyes.

"That's how you say it, right?"

"This is worse than I thought," says the first editor.

"Yeah dude," says the other. "Forget it."

■■■

This scenario, in various incarnations, has repeated itself over and over at *CGW* in recent weeks. COUNTER-STRIKE, a free, user-made, team-based multiplayer mod for HALF-LIFE, has completely taken over the lives of many gamers, including a few here at this magazine. Although it debuted way back in June 1999, the recent 1.1 release has made COUNTER-STRIKE more popular than ever.

Just today, for example, while waiting for some JPEGs of Jennifer Lopez to finish downloading, I did a random spot-check on Gamespy.com, and discovered that there were ten times as many COUNTER-STRIKE servers running as servers for the next game on the list. Ten times! I'm no statistics genius, but I think even the experts would agree with me that ten times is, like, a lot.

It's pretty funny, really. Here are all these huge multinational game companies, investing millions of dollars, desperately trying to create some kinda blockbuster game that will keep their stockholders from diving out of skyscrapers. Then along comes some guy named "Gooseman," who, with a few friends, makes a humble little mod that he gives out free—and it becomes the online gaming sensation. If you listen closely, you can hear the sound of high-level gaming executives weeping into their whipped double-decaf mint mocha frappucinos.

■■■

Though I stonewalled those two *CGW* dorks, the secret truth is that I had already played COUNTER-STRIKE. The problem was that I was still trying to get over the trauma.

COUNTER-STRIKE is way, way tougher than your standard deathmatch game. The more realistic weaponry means it's much harder to aim but much easier to die. And the goal-oriented missions require you to study the maps, plan with your teammates, and think. None of this meshes very well with my standard deathmatch strategy, which is to stand in one spot, in a panic, and randomly spray bullets while screaming "Don't kill me!" at my monitor.

In my very first game, after I bought my initial weapon and ammo, I realized in horror as the round began that I'd forgotten to check my control setup, so I wasn't sure which button fired my weapon. Out of curiosity, I clicked the left mouse button. My weapon fired. Good. The only problem was that one of my teammates was now lying dead in a heap in front of me. The phrase "DOOFAEUS ATTACKS A TEAMMATE" appeared onscreen.

"You f*#&*#g jerk!!" another teammate typed.

"Is there friendly fire in this game?" I responded, frantically.

He shot me, and I crumpled to the ground. Yes, there was friendly fire in the game.

A few rounds later, I was actually the last man standing on my team. My ego was soaring. But with just a few seconds left in the round, our victory assured, I blew myself up with a grenade. When the next round started, another player was so frustrated that he shot me and said to get off his team.

Honestly, though COUNTER-STRIKE is a team-based game, I don't think I've ever seen less teamwork involved in any multiplayer game. Maybe it was just the servers I tried, but for a game with such a hardcore, "macho" vibe to it, I've never come across a bigger concentration of whiners and babies in all my years of game playing.

"If you just can't take the grade school–level verbal abuse, come look me up in EVERQUEST. I'll knit you a sweater."

"You stole my kill."

"Hey sh—head, no bunny hopping."

"There's no way you're not dead, cheater."

"Way to camp, a—hole."

And so on.

I'm not saying that all COUNTER-STRIKE players are like this. I'm not saying the game's no good. When I got onto good servers, with actual grown-up people, I had a blast. I was dead most of the time, sure, but I still had fun. Watching in spectator mode after dying was often more fun for this reflex-challenged editor than the game itself. What I am saying is, if you're a newbie wondering what all the fuss over COUNTER-STRIKE is about—beware. Not every bandwagon is meant for every gamer to jump on. And if you find yourself wounded and ravaged and exhausted from constant defeat in COUNTER-STRIKE, or if you just can't take the grade school–level verbal abuse, come look me up in EVERQUEST. I'll knit you a sweater. CGW

Jeff sends his apologies to Gooseman and Cliffe and the rest of the CS team, who have made an extremely cool mod that he's just too lame to play. Send strategies and hate mail to jeff_green@ziffdavis.com.

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- 32MB NVIDIA® GeForce2 MX 4X AGP Graphics
- Internal 56K Capable® FaxModem
- 59WHr Li-Ion Battery
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- 32MB NVIDIA® GeForce2 MX 4X AGP Graphics
- Internal 56K Capable® FaxModem
- 59WHr Li-Ion Battery
- harman/kardon® Audio
- MS® Works Suite 2001 ■ MS® Windows® Me
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- 16MB ATI® Rage™ Pro
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- SoundBlaster 64V PCI LC Sound Card
- harman/kardon® Speakers
- 56K Capable[6] PCI Telephony Modem
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- 8X/4X/32X Max CD-RW Drive
- SB Live! Value Digital
- Harman Kardon® HK-695 Surround Sound Speakers with Subwoofer
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- Harman Kardon® HK-695 Surround Sound Speakers with Subwoofer
- 56K Capable[6] PCI Telephony Modem
- MS® Works Suite 2001 ■ MS® Windows® Me
- 1-Yr Limited Warranty[2]
- 1-Yr At-Home Service[4]
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intel inside
pentium® III

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1.5GHz. my friends are envious. my enemies are scared.





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- 17" (16.0" vis, .26dp) M781s FD Trinitron® Monitor
- 32MB NVIDIA® GeForce2 MX 4X AGP Graphics
- 48X Max CD-ROM Drive
- harman/kardon® Speakers
- SoundBlaster 64V PCI LC Sound Card
- 56K Capable® PCI Telephony Modem
- MS® Works Suite 2001
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